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The Man of Orleans

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FOCH

The Man of Orleans

by

LIDDELL HART

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TO

FOUR GOOD FRIENDS

E. D. S. E. G. H. F. A. P. F. B. A.

FOR GOOD TURNS

PREFACE

THIS book does not pretend to be an "official" biography, although General Weygand has generously helped me in collecting and checking facts, as well as in giving me his impressions on certain issues. The more tribute is due to him because he has not sought in any way to influence my judgment. As he has refrained from imposing any conditions in return for his aid, it is all the more just that I should make it clear that he has no responsibility for the conclusions reached in this book.

I realise that these conclusions may impair the popular conception of Marshal Foch's achievement, if not of his spirit. No one will regret such an effect more than I do. For it has been with reluctance that I have yielded my own original conception in face of the facts laid bare by research into the history of the war. If I may appear critical, I can only say that I have kept my criticism on a tight rein while giving the facts free rein—as true history requires. Such criticisms as I make are implicit in the facts, which cannot be burked. And I have purposely restrained criticism because of a feeling that the indefinable effect of Foch's spirit endowed his actions with more effect than the facts convey.

It is my strongest hope that the book will in no sense be regarded as an "attack" on, or "exposure" of, Foch. It certainly brings out his too absorbing devotion to the offensive in the theory and practice of war—and the grave consequences not only to France but to her Allies. But, this question apart, the book is really an analysis of the limitations which high command suffered under the conditions of the World War. The effective influence of the higher commander was thwarted by the difficulty not only of knowing the facts of the situation but of knowing them in time to take action which fitted them—before they had changed.

P R E F A C E

As for my criticism of the offensive doctrine, it does not exceed the way Marshal Foch himself castigates that "too exclusive passion for the offensive and the useless repulses and cruel losses thereby caused." My supplement has merely been to trace Marshal Foch's own influence in fostering that too "exclusive passion" which caused such "useless repulses and cruel losses"—not only in 1914 but later.

B. H. L. H.

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FOCH
The Man of Orleans

Chapter I

TWO NAPOLEONS

IT was the month of October in the year 1851. A few months earlier Queen Victoria, assisted by the Prince Consort, had gone to Hyde Park to open the Great Exhibition which was to inaugurate a Golden Age of international peace and prosperity. A Crystal Palace was perhaps an insecure abode for the spirit of peace. Even at its opening, clouds were gathering beyond the Channel.

In France, three years earlier, the attempt to withdraw a dole which had aggravated the unemployed problem had led to the "June Days" of insurrection and its suppression, in which the Socialist party was crushed from above and the republic sapped from below. The Duke of Wellington, in comment, wrote: "France needs a Napoleon!" She had not long to wait. Unlimited democracy paved the way to the revival of unlimited monarchy. The new constitution of November, 1848, combined the grant of universal suffrage with the delegation of power to a president who should be emperor in all but name. The newly enfranchised masses gave their vote to the name of Napoleon, as borne by one who was both the nephew and the adopted grandson of the first Emperor. It was a quick change from ridiculed adventurer to socialistic saviour of the people. Carried to power by his unlimited flattery of the masses and their unlimited faith in a legend, Louis Napoleon worked to convert the presidency into a permanency, and to add the name of emperor. The Assembly feebly strove to resist the tide, but merely precipitated its own submergence. The autumn of 1851 saw the gathering of forces against an Assembly which could dispose of none, and at last on "the night of Austerlitz" the *coup d'état* was carried out.

It came exactly two months after another night of "internal" crisis produced by a humble bearer of the same name. History may note the coincidence; contemporary opinion would hardly have ascribed significance to it. For it was the commonest of all human crises—that which precedes the delivery of a child. And it took place on a bed that lay obscurely in an alcove at the back of a room which was indistinguishable from several million such rooms in the bourgeois homes of France. The room had two shuttered windows overlooking the street and was one of eight in an apartment above a baker's shop, No. 43, Rue St. Louis, in the little Pyrenean town of Tarbes. The apartment belonged to Monsieur Napoléon Foch, who in compensation for a small salary bore the high-sounding title of Secretary-General of the Prefecture of the Hautes Pyrénées.

Only function, and not family ties, linked him to Tarbes. His family came from the village of Valentine in the neighbouring department of the Haute Garonne. If his child would thus be an exotic plant, the fact was a fulfilment of heredity. And like plants the Fochs, although occasionally transplanted, were quick to take root and flourish in new surroundings. Here heredity cast its shadow across the future.

It is certain that the family of Foch had been rooted in Valentine since the seventeenth century, for a Jean Foch died there in 1693. There is a dubious tradition that they had come south from Alsace during the wars of religion. It is more likely that their move was a shorter one—that they came from Ariège and sprang from the old Celtiberian stock of that adjacent Pyrenean district.

Fancy fanned by fame has played round the derivation of the name of the Fochs. A plausible suggestion is that originally they adopted the name of their feudal lords, the Counts of Foix, for this in the local patois is pronounced "Fouch." Its original derivation may be from the Latin words *focus* or *fodum*. Symbolically, either has a delightful fitness. The "fire" of martial leadership or the "fire" which consumes the enemy.* The "fosse" or ditch which bars the enemy's path.

* This etymology is strengthened by the fact that in the dialect of the district fire is called "fioch."

Those who wish can even find a mystical significance in the arms of Valentine, once an important town. For they are unique in the provinces of France as a link with the arms of the old kingdom of France: the fleurs-de-lis surmounted by a crown, upheld by a lion, and having two angels as supporters. The crown—is it the forecast of November 11, 1918? The lion—is it merely the emblem of courage, or the symbol of Britain's alliance? The angel—what is it? Perhaps a spiritualised version of the American eagle. Perhaps the guardian angel whose services were so often needed by, and liberally rendered to, the child about to be born.

But when one passes from fancy to history, one must confess that, in his ancestry, romance ends with the name. Originally manufacturers of paper, since the days of Louis XIV the Fochs had been wool merchants, although finding an outlet for adventure and a test of hardihood in perilous trading journeys across the mountains into Spain. This experience strengthened their religious faith; it also gave them a habit of collecting Christian names of Spanish origin and religious flavour for their offspring. A temporary reaction came with the Dominique Foch, who was not only head of the family but head of the commune of Valentine in the days of the Revolution. Before it, he shared the honours with his priest brother in a brisk internal struggle of families for the dominating rôle in the township.

During the Revolution, his brother and his rivals alike receded into the background, and left to him the onerous leadership for which he showed so much aptitude. Foremost in council, he was only one degree behind as a man of action. For at the outset he became second-captain of the second company of the National Guard at Valentine. And it is perhaps significant of a new-born military enthusiasm that on paper he signed himself *capitaine conseiller*. There is even a tradition that, anticipating Bonaparte, he dared, while the Terror was at its height, to disperse a riotous rabble, and that he forcibly maintained a reign of order in Valentine.

The time of Bonaparte's rise to power in France saw the crowning of Dominique Foch's power in Valentine by his

assumption of the office of Mayor. His business flourished also, and his new dignity was celebrated by building a new house, with a fine doorway, seven windows on the front, and a large salon decorated, but scarcely adorned, with panels painted by a local artist whose gifts were perhaps numbed by such flights of luxury and the luxury of having a patron.

Dominique Foch was equally active in another line. In fourteen years of marriage he had eight children. He did not live to see Napoleon crowned Emperor, but in happy anticipation of that event he gave, in 1803, his latest-born son the name of Napoléon. As a further token of his own incompletely satisfied martial ambition and militant patriotism, he borrowed for his son also the Christian name of Bertrand du Guesclin. 'Then, a year later, prematurely worn out by his variety of activities, he died.

But whatever martial dreams Dominique Foch had indulged in on behalf of his son were to be frustrated. Waterloo came too soon for their fulfilment. So Napoléon Foch turned instead to carve a career for himself in that army of civil servants which was to become almost as numerous as the Grande Armée, if less bountiful in batons. The traditional religious bent of his family was strengthened in him when he was for a time posted to Lourdes, even then a place of pilgrimage, although the peasant girl Bernadette was not to have her vision of the Virgin until a generation later. He had already, in 1832, brought a military tradition into the ancestry of his offspring by marrying Marie-Jacqueline-Sophie, daughter of the Chevalier Dupré of Argèles.

Dupré himself had left home at sixteen to enlist in the Chasseurs of Dauphiné, a picked corps of the old Royal Army. The Revolutionary wars gave him the opportunity to win distinction and a commission in the Army of Italy. After Austerlitz, he gained his captaincy, and although his third wound, received in the Spanish Campaign of 1809, ended his active campaigning, he was compensated in 1812 by appointment to the Legion of Honour. To support his new dignity, he adopted a coat of arms which embraced a lion rampant, a drawn sword, and a Gallic cock—prophetic symbolism again.

With the restoration of the Bourbons he had little else than dignity to support him. The task of living was not made easier by his generosity both to old comrades and to any others who would listen to his recital of past glories. As he was decisively master in his own house, wifely sighs were of no avail to check this generosity, but its consequences contributed to make him accept the more readily an offer from his son-in-law. For Napoléon Foch, on being appointed to Tarbes in 1849, invited his wife's parents to leave their home and share his. Only an understanding of the time and of his nationality can make this son-in-law's wish comprehensible to us.

But it had the result that the "last post" of this old soldier of Napoleon coincided with the "reveille" of a young soldier who in turn was to take his last post at the side of Napoleon.

It was the 2nd of October, 1851, when, at ten o'clock in the evening, a third child and second son was born to Napoléon Foch, and given the name of Ferdinand. His arrival had been preceded by that of a sister and a brother. Eugénie was destined to remain unmarried and the guardian of the *lares* at Valentine, outliving even her long-lived brothers; Gabriel became a lawyer and practised at Tarbes. After Ferdinand came Germain, who, entering the Jesuit order, was the indirect means of jeopardising the career of a brother he dearly loved.

Religion and Napoleon seem to have been the strongest influences in the childhood of Ferdinand. He was only six years old when Bernadette Soubirous had the first of her visions in the grotto of Lourdes. More enthusiastically than the prefect, more readily even than the Church, Napoléon Foch accepted the authenticity of the revelation. He exerted his power of persuasion, and his wife her prayers, in support of Bernadette. The experience of this time of great spiritual emotion not only strengthened the devoutness of the parents, but moulded the impressionable minds of their children. Nor was it unique.

Indeed, the parents' Catholicity seems to have been of such generous proportions that for their fervour local patriotism was not enough. Valentine had more than its share of miraculous associations until they fell into the shadow cast by the Virgin of

Lourdes. The Chapel of the Virgin at the Bout du Puy had been a pre-Bernadette centre of pilgrimage, while in Valentine itself Pontius Pilate was born, and his house could still be pointed out to any who doubted the story. Perhaps we may trace some of the indelible impressions of childhood in the course of Ferdinand's later life.

The Napoleonic influence developed somewhat later. Ferdinand was a baby in arms of three months when his grandfather died suddenly. Old Guard and New Guard had barely time to present "arms." It is true that the youngster had another Napoleonic relic left—his great-aunt, the widow of General Nogues, who had risen to that rank after enlisting as a drummer boy in the old Royal Army. Aunt "Ni," as the children called her, was never tired of recounting the glories of Napoleon, of fighting his battles over again. And, being extremely deaf, her anecdotalage was not easily interrupted. Moreover, the habit of living in the past had induced a confusion with the present, perhaps accentuated by the recent dawn of another Napoleon and a second Empire. Thus she was apt to talk to the "little Napoleons"—as the Foch children were known in Valentine—as if not only she but they had actually shared in the events of the First Empire. "You remember, Ferdinand, the ball that *He* gave that evening," or "You remember, Ferdinand, that on the eve of Austerlitz . . ." To which, with the uncompromising logic of childhood, the small boy would as regularly reply: "No, Aunt, because I was not born." It was perhaps more to his immediate taste when he was allowed one evening, for a fête, to don the General's old uniform. Nevertheless, many drops of this Napoleonic shower inevitably percolated the susceptible child mind, and family anecdotes produced a desire for knowledge slightly more reliable.

Those who know the appetite of the studious small boy for curiously solid fare will not be surprised to learn that the massive volumes of Thiers' *The Consulate and the Empire* composed from early years his favourite diet. He himself used to say later "At eleven I knew the battles of Marengo and Trafalgar off by heart." The emphasis on Trafalgar is surprising, and appears the more so in view of the fact that fifty years later, if we are to

believe his friend Sir Henry Wilson, he agreed with Joffre in rating the British Navy as not worth "one bayonet." But the literary appetite of boyhood is usually greater than its power of assimilation. Knowledge comes, but wisdom tarries.

The Napoleonic influence was early signalled by a coincidence. When ten years old, the boy had gone to the *lycée* at Tarbes, where, after a promising first year, he had dropped abruptly out of the prize-list in his second year. Then Napoléon Foch was transferred to the post of public paymaster at Rodez, and in consequence his sons had a change of school. It was at the *lycée* at Rodez that Ferdinand's future career was determined. For in words strangely parallel to those applied to Napoleon Bonaparte at the same age, his mathematical master, Almeras by name, uttered the verdict: "A geometrical mind. He has in him the making of a polytechnician."

Henceforth the boy had a goal, all the better for him because its pursuit was hard. For the Polytechnique was, and is, not merely a cadet college for the artillery and engineers, but the gateway to most of the higher posts in the Civil Service.

The task of preparation suffered interruption. When Ferdinand was fifteen, his father's post was suppressed, and while he was waiting for another appointment his son was sent for a year to the seminary at Polignan. But the priests were painstaking teachers and encouraged the boy to specialise in mathematics. Moreover, the other students were mostly older, preparing for the priesthood. As he said later: "They swotted all the time. . . . So to keep pace with them I had to pull a stiff oar. That's what I learnt best there—to pull a stiff oar."

The benefit was seen when, on his father taking up the office of Collector of Taxes at St. Etienne, he was sent with Gabriel to the Jesuit College of St. Michael at that place. The young Fochs, now competing with class-mates of their own age, gained a passing unpopularity by making a clearance of the prizes. But the Pyrenees were close enough to preserve them from priggishness, and at least in their holidays, spent at Valentine, they led an open-air life. Best of all was the fun of accompanying their father when he went shooting or fishing.

If a story of this period be true it reveals more clearly than any how indelible was by now the impression of Napoleon on the mind of Ferdinand. For it is said that before one such expedition his father found him seated on the floor poring over books on Napoleon to discover whether he also had gone fishing in his school holidays. One can only say that, if the story is a later invention, it is so apt that it had to be invented.

These field excursions became the more enchanting in retrospect when he missed them by going further afield. For in 1869, after taking his *baccalauréat*, he was sent to the Jesuit College of St. Clement at Metz, which had a notable record of successes in the entrance examination for the Polytechnique. "I remained six months without seeing the sun. I could not get used to it! I came from the Pyrenees. . . . Later I became acclimatised. But it was hard. Still, I had come to work, and there they worked hard. . . ."

What impression did the thick-set young Pyrenean, fair of hair and square of chin, make on his schoolfellows? He attracted them by his contrasts. "Impulsive yet pensive." His strong and sturdy build offset by a rather gentle look in his blue eyes. Shy, yet anxious to be friendly. Sparing of words, but already apt to express himself vigorously in gesture. He walked about with his eyes on the ground, but looked anyone full in the face when talking. Personality prevailed over popularity when, in his second year, he was voted by his schoolfellows the "grand prix de sagesse."

The coming of war in 1870 interrupted his sure progress towards the Polytechnique. The armies had mobilised and were groping towards each other while Foch was sitting for his written tests in the examination room at Metz. The excitement was too high for concentration, and thoughts wandered from the paper to the battlefield so close at hand. Yet the subject set for the essay stuck in Foch's mind—"Develop this thought of Kléber's—'Youth must train its faculties.'" For what? He was soon to find the answer. He would go to the Polytechnique to become a soldier, not a civil servant.

He was a soldier earlier even than he dreamt that hot August

day. For the morrow brought news of MacMahon's defeat at Worth on the 6th, and produced a general retirement of the French armies to the Moselle. Foch later recalled how—"In front of the Prefecture I saw Napoleon III. The square was full of carriages, and in a barouche the Emperor was starting off, ill, tired and depressed. . . . The Grand Hotel was being used as headquarters. Bazaine's staff was installed there in complete chaos. The general was playing billiards." If hearsay had become mixed with this recollection it did not affect the hard impression made upon the young man's mind. And it was reinforced by the experiences of the following days.

The College closed, and the students dispersed, amid the rumblings of disaster. A panic-stricken crowd seethed on the platform when Foch caught the train for Paris. In his compartment was an old peasant woman, a refugee from Strasbourg, whose sole luggage was a pot of geranium. Once back at St. Etienne, he could not bear its restful remoteness, and, with his father's permission, he enlisted as a private soldier in the 4th Regiment of the Line. But the knowledge that qualified him for the Polytechnique was no qualification for a fighting man, and thus he had to undergo, first at the St. Etienne dépôt, and then in camp at Chalon-sur-Saône, the dull but essential process of learning to drill and to handle arms.

The process was duller and more prolonged than it need have been, because the Government of National Defence had to depend on generals "deficient in intelligence and enthusiasm. They were old men brought up in the old school and were persuaded . . . that soldiers and armies were made gradually." As Foch saw, and history shows, their futility forfeited the excellent chance that Gambetta had of inducing the Germans to concede a satisfactory peace rather than be drawn, for their part, into the futility of a prolonged war.

The horizon of the French generals, however, was limited by the parade ground. And, as one consequence, the young soldier Foch was fated, like so large a part of the newly raised levies of France, to see the issue settled and the war ended before he had fired a shot. More fortunate, in his eyes at least, was his close

friend at St. Clement's, Rivet de Chaussepierre, who was given a commission and fell in action. Foch is reported to have said, on hearing the news: "A glorious death, and one to be envied. You shall be revenged."

Although he himself saw no fighting, he was fortunate to survive. "We had scarcely enlisted before we were sent into training camps, where we slept under canvas. We had a terrible winter and died like flies. Why were we treated so stupidly? Because the old-timers believed that nothing but the hardest training and privations, and sleeping under canvas, could form soldiers—which is ridiculous."

Foch's short experience was not without compensation. From what he saw, and still more from what he heard, he learnt an invaluable negative lesson. The inherent failing and natural tendency of armies was revealed to him at an age when he could profit by it. "The leaders knew how to make war as well as an elephant knows how to climb a ladder. The colonel? Good, at most, for the command of a company. And even more! For walking in front, and crying 'Forward!' with a cigar in his mouth. They followed him. Brave? Certainly they were brave. Very! But bravery is quite beside the point. They were soldiers, fine soldiers, but not leaders. What is required of leaders is that they should command. . . . They were not stupid, they were intelligent. . . . Very genteel, plenty of go, plenty of good humour. But it is not enough to strut about and march past in brilliant style."

Thus the young soldier had his eyes opened to the need for education. And more, for thought. Still more, for a wider horizon. The question for him was how to apply the lesson. The question of history is how far he remembered it when his own test in command came. How far was his light to be dimmed by the forty odd years of peace-time soldiering which were to follow? Would he fall into the rut of conventional thought?

It was at least with a fertilising experience that after his discharge in March, 1871, he went back to his mathematical studies at Metz, with not merely the Polytechnique but beyond it the Army as his goal. And beyond the Army there was now also a goal.

Chapter II

THE STAMP OF DESTINY

THE crash of a salvo shook the windows of the classroom. Fired by German gunners. The forts of Metz were announcing to the occupied city that its permanent bondage was decreed.

For it was the evening of May 11th, 1871, and away to the eastward in the Swan Hotel at Frankfort-on-Main, Prince Bismarck and Jules Favre a few hours earlier had affixed their signatures to a momentous piece of paper. Henceforth Alsace and much of Lorraine were part of the new German Empire.

In the classroom at St. Clement's the message of the guns needed no interpreter. The boys jumped to their feet. The superintendent, rising more soberly, cried, "Mes enfants !"—and then, unable to say more, lowered his head and joined his hands as if in prayer. The memory of that terrible moment was never effaced from the minds of the students. Least of all from that of Foch.

There were not lacking other incidents to engrave it more deeply. A tedious three days' journey, as no trains were running by night, had brought Foch back to the occupied city to find that German troops were even billeted in the College. Flushed with victory, these were not slow to assert the authority of the conqueror, and their pin-pricks were the more resented by sensitive youths because they felt their powerlessness to retaliate. But not always. For Foch himself told the story how—"In the courtyard where we used to play one of the Pomeranians who kept guard over us took our ball on the pretence that we had thrown it into a forbidden area. Then I collected all my friends, we dashed to the assault and recaptured our ball from him !" Neither Foch nor history relates whether this assault brought retribution. Perhaps

the Germans made more allowance for youth than youth was in the mood to make for them.

Patriotic pride was galled afresh when Foch went to Nancy to sit for his Polytechnique entrance examination. For the ancient capital of Lorraine was still occupied, until the war indemnity should be paid, by the troops of General Manteuffel, and Foch had to suffer the mortification of listening to German Army bands each day when he came out of the examination room where he was competing for entry to the French Army.

Perchance this distraction affected his concentration, for although he gained a place in the Polytechnique entry, that place—76th on a list of 140—was not so high as his work at Metz had promised. Still more probable it was owing to the accompaniment that his ear, though always sensitive to religious music, became so patriotically deaf that half a century later he rebuffed the suggestion that he was a lover of Wagner with the assertion that the only music he knew was the first two bars of the *Madclon*.

It is certainly clear that the strains of the German military music in 1871 made a deeper than aural impression, for when he took over command at Nancy forty-two years later he cleansed his memory with fanfares—fanfares that heralded the coming of a greater revenge. And this was to be the fulfilment of a life's aim to which he had dedicated himself before leaving St. Clement's. According to an anecdote, he then declared: "Alsace-Lorraine must be regained; France must never again be defeated; I must be one of her liberators." It is natural to read in these words that were fulfilled a prophetic sense of personal fulfilment. If so, we might suspect that they had been fitted to the facts. But they do not really suggest more than the natural vow of any young patriot to play a part in restoring his country's loss. And their virtue lies not in the speaker's clairvoyance but in his steady application to the task of fitting himself to be ready for an opportunity that might, or might not, come.

On November 5th, 1871, the new class assembled at the Polytechnique, then housed in the buildings of the former College of Navarre. Thereby arose a coincidence which may have seemed to Foch a welcome and an omen. For over the portal was en-

graved the same motto, in Latin, that had adorned the door of his first school at Tarbes—"May this house stand until the ant has drunk the waters of the sea, and the tortoise has made the circuit of the earth." But, in truth, it was fortunate to be still standing when Foch arrived, soon after the Commune had been suppressed. The buildings had been occupied by the Communists, and stormed by a battalion of chasseurs, whose abrupt entry had allowed the occupants time only to flee by way of the chemical laboratory, and had thus averted any attempt to set the buildings on fire. Even so, they had suffered from the poor shooting of the Père-Lachaise batteries bombarding the Panthéon. They had also witnessed the death of some of the Communists, summarily executed there during those bloody days when the Army had exacted its revenge from the mob to the tune of over twenty thousand death-rattles. A revenge that in its excess was perhaps an outlet for the mortification inflicted by a foreign foe.

The shame of defeat in the field, the bitter memory of civil strife—engraved by bullets on the very walls of the Polytechnique—lay heavy on the minds of the 1871 class of students. It could be momentarily eclipsed by the brightness which came on first donning uniform. Even in old age Foch could recall the thrill of his first walk thus attired: "We walked about tapping the ground with our heels, and we held ourselves very straight as if something had changed in the aspect of the universe." But for a time the school which had been a mortuary retained the sombre air of a monastery.

As there were no entertainments to relieve the steady grind of work in an institution where recreation has always played a minor part, Foch was incited to obtain in the library such relief as the long hours of study permitted. There he made fresh inroads into Napoleonic literature and discovered the further charm of historical romance in the works of Walter Scott. But, whatever his acquired zeal and industry, the ebullient spirits of a Gascon youth found an irksome repression in such an atmosphere. He eagerly seized a chance of release which came at the end of his first year, when his position on the list had risen to forty-seventh.

There was a call for Polytechnicians to enter the Ecole d'Appli-

cation, the artillery training school at Fontainebleau. The re-organisation of the Army was in progress, and there was a shortage of officers, especially in the artillery and engineers. Disaster had at least revealed the deficiencies of, and in, these technical arms.

His application accepted, he was posted to the school in February, 1873. The newly commissioned officer of artillery—Napoleon's own arm—had thus a fresh immersion in Napoleonic memories. A youth so susceptible could not fail to be thrilled and inspired by the shades of Fontainebleau. Long rides through the forest had a practical purpose but also an appeal to the mystical element in him. The duality was characteristic. Eighteen months later he finished his course, passing out third. His high place gave him choice of regiment and station ; he went to the 24th Regiment of Artillery at Tarbes. The return to his actual birthplace may have been a coincidence, but the choice of locality was inspired by his desire "to work and dream in the shadow of the mountains."

After two years of regimental routine, lightened by the sense of sharing in a patriotic reconstruction, he left Tarbes in 1876 for the Cavalry School at Saumur to perfect his horsemanship. He did so. He even acquired for life the cavalryman's walk. His taste in mounts, too, was as fine as his seat on a horse, and it was reflected later in the fact that his supreme tribute to any officer became: "He's a thoroughbred."

But his dominant motive seems to have been less a pure delight in riding than the practical one of fitting himself for the future, and he turned pleasure into work so thoroughly that his initial zest was deadened by satiety. In the twilight of life, confessing that he had given up equitation, he wryly remarked: "For forty years, less by conviction than by duty, because it was a military article of faith that in war one should always be on horseback, I forced myself to ride every morning, winter and summer, whatever the weather, from half-past seven to half-past nine. And, look at the irony of things! The war breaks out, it lasts four years, even a little longer, and not once during those four years, save for ceremonial parades, did I have occasion to show my

horsemanship. In fact, I ceased to handle a horse from the day I began to handle troops in war. What a joke !”

More purposeful than ever, the Foch of Saumur days had not changed but merely matured. His fellows at Saumur noted that he was still the old mixture of impulsiveness and reserve, of energy and restraint. He still walked about with his head down, deep in his thoughts. In finding expression for them the training of his muscles at Saumur would have as much influence as the training of his mind at the Polytechnique.

In September, 1878, he was promoted captain—the shortage of officers bringing him unusually quick advancement. And from Saumur he was posted to the 10th Regiment of Artillery, stationed at Rennes. A generation was to pass before the Dreyfus court-martial brought ill-fame to this Breton town. To Foch it brought happiness in double measure. For he so fell in love with Brittany that he became its son by adoption. And the adoption was the surer, the tie the stronger, because he fell in love with a daughter of Brittany.

Celt and Catholic himself, he was the more readily responsive to the charm of a province that was by tradition, religion, and atmosphere a ready-made home for his spirit. And at Rennes he first met Julie Bienvenue—how amazingly apt a name ! She was the only and orphan child of a lawyer, sprung from a family as religious and solidly bourgeois as Foch’s own. As Celtic also, with a vein both of culture and of mysticism running through the bourgeois rock. Like her future husband, Julie Bienvenue had a prosaic civil tradition on her father’s side—even though his father had flavoured it with poetry and ecclesiastical history—while through her maternal grandfather, who brought her up at St. Brieuc, she was of the blood of Godart Rochard, whose adventures in the armies of Napoleon surpassed those of the Chevalier Dupré.

Foch did not marry in haste. In 1880 he left Rennes for Paris, on appointment to the Artillery Committee at the Ministry of War. There it fell to him to write an official handbook for non-commissioned officers of artillery on the theory of their craft. Despite the post-war changes in material and in methods of fire,

the authorities, characteristically, had overlooked the need to provide such guidance until aroused by the success of an unofficial handbook. Then the Artillery Committee decided that an official book was necessary and appointed Captain Foch to prepare it. Realising that it would kill the sale of the unofficial book, whose author was an old comrade of Polytechnique days, Foch both warned him and retarded the progress of his own book, in order that the unofficial book might have a chance to sell out before the other was published.

This official literary experience does not seem to have inspired him with respect for official literary productions, for which he had always a caustic comment in later life. But it at least affected the way he wrote. From that period dates his bold yet careful script, its copybook uniformity of outline relieved by the expressively emphatic pressure on the downstrokes. He himself related its evolution thus: "General Minot, a real eighteenth-century general, said to me: 'You write very badly; one can't read it.' I wrote like nothing on earth. At the Ecole Polytechnique they write on their knees; in the lecture-rooms there are no tables. One develops bad habits. And, besides, while a lieutenant I had not often handled the pen. Then I took to big pens, Rumboldtes, and I began to write a very large hand. I was obliged to form my letters. I practised hard. Six months later the General said to me: 'You are beginning to be legible!' And, further, that forced me to write slowly. Then one has time to reflect, to think of what one means. . . ."

Foch perhaps overrated the benefits. With slow writing the pen controls the mind, rather than the mind controlling the pen. It tends to a jerkiness of thought and to breaks in the thread of thought. Hence perhaps the inconclusive ideas and contradictions to be found in Foch's later books on war. And to the preciseness with which he formed his letters and dotted his "i's" can perhaps be traced that lack of precision which is often noticeable in his thought.

In 1881 Foch was posted to the 9th Regiment of Artillery. His leaves were spent in Brittany, but not for another two years, when he was thirty-two, did he commit himself to marriage. His entry

into the wedded state took place on the twelfth anniversary of his entry into the Polytechnique. Lovers of coincidence may note that the most eventful dates of his life were to fall within the twelve days from October 31st to November 11th. His marriage was one of solid affection rather than sudden passion, and was not allowed to interfere with work. Even when he took leave from duty to come back with his wife to St. Bricuc he rose regularly at seven o'clock, went out riding and came back to study.

For his immediate goal was now the French Staff College, the *Ecole Supérieure de Guerre*, situated in Paris. He gained admission in 1885 and passed out fourth on the list two years later. When, a decade later, Foch himself became a teacher, he said: "It was not until 1882-83 that the subject of war was taught in France on a rational and practical basis, and that despite the fact that our school dated from 1876. The fact of putting an inscription on the walls had not sufficed to create the school of War." Thus in his opinion it would seem that he had entered the *Ecole de Guerre* at the right time, even though right by a narrow margin of time. Perhaps a later generation may deem that he was too early. For what he learnt there inevitably influenced his own teaching later, while those he taught were the men who really formulated the final pre-1914 plan and doctrine of war. "By their fruits ye shall know them." History suggests that it is unfair to judge any prophet by the dogmas of his disciples, but history has made it possible to judge Foch by his own acts—his own practice of his theories.

From the *Ecole de Guerre*, in November, 1887, Foch was appointed on probation to the staff of the XVI Army Corps at Montpellier. This spot, so close to the Mediterranean, would also have been within conveniently close reach of his parental home—if that home had not become desolate. For his father had died in 1880, owing, in the son's opinion, to a long habit of insufficient nourishment. As Napoléon Foch was seventy-seven at the time of his "premature" decease, it is evident that the family had high standards of longevity!

Ferdinand's mother died a few weeks after his wedding, and at

Valentine only his sister Eugénie remained to hold the ends of the broken link. For Ferdinand its breaking helped towards a deeper breach with the past—the transfer to Brittany of his permanent home. In Brittany he and his wife usually spent their holidays, and the very fact that he came there to find rest and change from dusty garrison towns and stuffy offices helped to rivet the Armorican spell more firmly on his soul. Some years later, about 1895, he acknowledged his final surrender to it by purchasing a small estate salled Treufeunteuniou near Ploujean.

He himself gave another and simpler reason for his action : “ My wife was born in Brittany, and husbands, in contradiction to the law, often—in fact, nearly always—follow their wives. Nine times out of ten they show good sense in doing so. That is why I bought my little place.”

Within close reach of the northern coast, Ploujean lies on the outskirts of historic Morlaix, where the gabled wooden houses with their outside staircases and inner courts preserve the air of medieval romance. The severe outline of the house, stone built and oblong, was softened by the clinging tendrils of vine and honeysuckle, as well as by its frame of trees, relics of the great forest of Broceliande. The estate covered some seventy acres, in part the home of hare and partridge. So, for Foch, it provided an abundant chance to enjoy his favourite recreation, to develop that form of skill in which he most excelled, and to draw upon a favourite source of metaphor for his military lectures.

A landmark in his domestic life, the purchase of this Breton home was sequel to a landmark, perhaps the greatest, in his career. Each opened a new horizon. From 1895 onwards Foch became a factor in, and a growing influence on, the course of world history.

But before this landmark is reached there is a gap in his record to fill. After his period of probation he had been posted to the staff of the 31st Division, which formed part of the XVI Army Corps at Montpellier. But he was destined to be brought back soon from the circumference to the centre of the Army by the magnetic effect of the impression he had made earlier on those he had served. In August, 1890, he was summoned to the Ministry of War, to join the Third Bureau of the General Staff—the inner-

most sanctuary of the General Staff, as it is the "Operations" branch and deals with war plans. We have his own evidence as to the impression it made upon him and the impression he made upon its personnel. "At that time they were still rather old-fashioned. I was regarded as a revolutionary there; I wrote brief orders, I did not fill up all the pigeon-holes; they criticised me. I replied: 'Have I put in every point?' 'Yes!' 'Well, what more do you want?'"

That Foch had such a bad character at the age of forty is good testimony to his moral quality, showing that he still possessed one of the two attributes essential in both the leader and the teacher. An army is an institution not merely conservative but retrogressive by nature. It has such natural resistance to progress that it is always ensured against the danger of being pushed ahead too fast. Far worse and more certain, as history abundantly testifies, is the danger of it slipping backward. Like a man pushing a barrow up a hill, if the soldier ceases to push, the military machine will run back and crush him. To be deemed a revolutionary in the army is merely an indication of vitality, the pulse-beat which shows that the mind is still alive. When a soldier ceases to be a revolutionary, it is a sure sign that he has become a mummy. If Foch at forty preserved the urge to progress, the fact established his moral fitness for the influence he was soon to exercise. His mental fitness for it would depend on his range of vision and of study. Here, much would depend on the course of his self-preparation.

It is a paradox in military affairs that the surest way to obtain a hearing for unorthodox views is to prove oneself a master of orthodox actions. When preparation for the battlefield was neglected for the immaculate conception of the parade ground, a tactical enthusiast could gain recognition, and condonation for his eccentricities, by showing his superiority to others as a drill-master.

Thus we should not be surprised to discover the narrow path whereby Foch obtained his chance to deal with the wider problems of war. In 1891, his second year on the General Staff, there were autumn manœuvres. "Oh! those autumn manœuvres. Naturally

they were to end with a review. I was appointed to organise it. . . . I astonished them. No one had ever succeeded before in massing more than 100,000 men on a rectangle 120 metres broad and 100 metres long—a mere pocket-handkerchief! I made them march past by Army Corps. At eight o'clock there wasn't even a cat on the parade ground. At ten minutes past there were 100,000 men. They came up from all sides, in columns, not in extended line. And a quarter of an hour after the review, the parade ground was absolutely empty. Every detachment had its own route to the entraining station. . . . Like a flight of sparrows!"

Promoted to Chef d'Escadron (Major) that same year he left the War Ministry for a turn of regimental duty, in command of a horse artillery group at Vincennes. This in itself was an augury, because of the priority traditionally accorded to the mobile branch of the artillery arm. In 1894 he again returned to the Operations branch of the General Staff, and then on October 31st, 1895, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Military History, Strategy, and Applied Tactics, at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre. It was his decisive opportunity, and to prove still more decisive in fulfilment. Curiously it came to him on a day in the year which nineteen years later marked a crisis in the fortunes of Foch and of the embattled forces in France.

Chapter III

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A FAITH

HOW far was Foch equipped for the task of teaching his subject? The answer is to be found in his own words: "What forced me to work at my profession was having to teach it. . . . I asked myself: 'What are the elements of war?' I read Clausewitz. . . . There was a man for you! There was something solid in that book." There certainly was. The ponderous tomes of Clausewitz are so solid as to cause mental indigestion to any student who swallows them without a long course of preparation. Only a mind developed by years of study and reflection can dissolve the solid lump into digestible particles. Critical power and a wide knowledge of history are also necessary for producing the juices to counteract the Clausewitzian fermentation.

In these corrective qualifications Foch was handicapped. For years, like most soldiers, his mind had been submerged in technical and tactical study, revolving on no higher plane than that of mimic battle exercises on the map and on the ground, conducted in accord with the prevailing formulas of official theory. If Foch was fond of reading history in his leisure hours, his historical reading would appear to have been limited in scope and dubious in substance. What he read, he read carefully and repeatedly, turning it over in his mind. But the value of such meditation depends on the matter absorbed and on the breadth of the reader's background.

There is no sign in Foch's lectures that he followed Napoleon's advice to "read and re-read the campaigns of the Great Captains" from Alexander to Frederick. Foch went no further back than the Napoleonic Wars and was satisfied to supplement these

simply by a study of the 1866 and 1870 campaigns, so that his deductions inevitably had a narrow basis. If this deprived his deductions of universal truth, their specific truth was impaired by the faultiness of his sources. For Napoleon's campaigns the idolatrous trend of military literature then in vogue caused Foch to rely on books that portrayed Napoleon as the immaculate genius of war ; for 1870, the records were still incomplete. And Foch had neither the time nor the bent for critical research.

It is true that some of his printed lectures are so packed with quotations as to give a casual reader the impression of wide learning, but under analysis many of these quotations are seen to be merely proverbial tags. For the historical, if not the philosophical, origins of Foch's ideas there is greater significance in what he omits to quote.

His theory of war was not original ; yet too recent. He took the philosophical frame of his theory direct from Clausewitz, who, as the teacher of the Prussian Army, had become the recognised master in the eyes of military Europe. The result of the 1866 and 1870 wars was accepted as proof that his theories were correct and his interpretation of Napoleon exact.

Clausewitz had proclaimed the sovereign virtues of the will to conquer, the unique value of the offensive carried out with unlimited violence by a nation in arms and the power of military action to override everything else. He had argued that to overthrow the main enemy in battle should be the primary aim. This was a theory of the ideal, rarely fulfilled in the history of war. Napoleon, its alleged exponent, attacked weakness rather than strength in his earlier and most profitable campaigns, cutting off the enemy's limbs before he attempted to overthrow the main body. And if, later, he tended to change his direction, it is well to remember that St. Helena became his destination.

In proclaiming his theory Clausewitz at least hedged it with reservations. Unfortunately it was the general tenor of his teaching that caught the attention of his followers, to the disregard of his qualifying comments. Thus what in his teaching was an undue emphasis became through them a distortion.

Foch acted as an amplifier for Clausewitz's more extreme notes.

In his mouth the destruction of the enemy's main army became the only means to the goal, and battle "the only argument in war." This ultra-narrow view led him to disregard other forms of pressure, naval and economic. It led him also into pitfalls of inconsistency. After declaring that "no strategy can prevail over that which seeks to obtain tactical results," he illustrated his general theory by a partial study of the campaign of 1796, a campaign in which Bonaparte actually attained his object without any general, still less any conclusive, engagement—by strategy so superior that it nullified the need for battle.

That Foch had caught only Clausewitz's strident generalisations, and not his subtler undertones, is apparent in the contradictions which mark the opening chapters of his first book, *Des Principes de la Guerre*. Although vivid wording and striking metaphors give an impression of radiance, the rays of thought are obscured by the dust of words. A sidelight on his own uncertainty is the way, when attempting to define the principles of war, he ends his brief list with an "etc."

A year after his appointment to the Ecole de Guerre the professorship of the course became vacant owing to the departure of Colonel Bonnal, who had left a deep impression on the theory taught there. Bonnal had sought by study to extract the secret of Napoleon's method, and tended to ascribe it primarily to the use of a strategic advanced guard—employed to feel for and seize hold of the enemy, paralysing his freedom of action. When Foch was told that he would be Bonnal's successor, he is said to have offered a momentary objection on the score that he was not yet sufficiently sure of his principles. If the diffidence did him credit, it was based on a justified doubt.

For it becomes clear that the incompleteness of his own study was a real handicap. And, in consequence, when he took the professorial chair of "Military History, Strategy, and Applied Tactics," he tended to make the first two subjects subordinate to the third—which lay within the field of his professional experience. In other words, he was content to teach what he knew, grafting it on a general theory of war that he accepted from authority without critical examination. It is true that he told his

pupils that they must learn to reason, that they must have "freedom of mind, no prepossessions"; but he immediately qualified this by saying that they would be taught a theory which, in his words, "would not be open to discussion."

To this attitude of mind he was predisposed by his military training, if perhaps also by his religious faith. And he was the less likely to question the Clausewitzian foundations of his military faith because they accorded so completely with his own character, with his unquestionable strength of will and passionate conviction of the power of faith to overcome obstacles.

Thus Foch's chief contribution to the French theory of war was to strengthen its Clausewitzian character. While many of the French military thinkers of the time had been tending to find Napoleon's secret recipe for victory in some geometrical formula of *manceuvre*, Foch, the former "geometrical mind," dwelt instead upon a psychological secret—"the will to conquer." He quoted a saying of Joseph de Maistre: "A lost battle is a battle which one believes lost; in a material sense no battle can be lost." From this he argued: "If defeat comes from moral causes, victory may come from moral causes also, and one may say, 'A battle won is a battle we will not acknowledge to be lost.'" Here he unveiled one aspect of the most fundamental truth in war. But his logic was illogical in order, and so incomplete. For the logical corollary to the argument that victory comes from moral causes is surely—"A battle won is a battle that we can persuade the enemy he has lost." This is the active form of the moral causes—which determine victory. Secondary to it, if its essential complement, is the passive form—the refusal to acknowledge defeat.

In the war to come, as in his teaching, Foch's main achievement was to infuse activity into the passive form. It would help him to triumphs of defence that had been conceived by him as offence. But success might have come earlier, and have been purchased at less cost, if he had preserved the logical order and given his first thought to the problem of developing the active form.

When Foch spoke of "we" he was, rightly, thinking primarily

not of the troops but of the commander. "An army is to a commander what a sword is to a soldier: it is only worth anything in so far as it receives from him a certain impulse." "Great results in war are due to the commander." Foch was fond of quoting Napoleon's aphorism: "Cæsar, and not the Roman legions, conquered Gaul, and Rome trembled before Hannibal, not because of the Carthaginian soldiery." But Foch's emphasis on the importance of the commander was one-sided. He was more concerned to fortify his own will as a commander than to weaken the will of the opposing commander.

Hence he gave too little attention to the active use of surprise, the most vital element in war, and the primary means by which one can persuade—or delude—the opponent that he has lost. Foch's teaching did not entirely ignore the use of surprise, but he narrowed it down to a mere accentuation of the physical act of concentrating superior force at one point. He dismissed the psychological subtleties practised by the pre-Napoleonic Great Captains as part of the "old fencing" and of the despised "small war" which had been superseded when the nation in arms came into vogue.

Yet, curiously, his predominant faith in moral power led him to underestimate material factors such as armament. His writings give inadequate emphasis to the effect of weapons, and their probable development, upon strategy and tactics. He was apparently too engrossed with the morale of the leader to meditate upon the way the possession of superior or inferior weapons might affect the morale of the led. And thus he tended to overlook the reaction of this effect upon the leader's power, with the result that when war came he himself was taken by surprise.

Is there a specific explanation of his disproportionate concern to strengthen the mind of the leader? Can we perhaps trace it to the disasters of 1870 and the impression they made on Foch's mind? He was determined to correct the sense of inferiority which those disasters had produced in the French Army. But in Foch's own concern, which led to a one-sided form of teaching, a psycho-analyst would probably detect a deep-seated "inferiority complex."

The suggestion is strengthened by a further contradiction. Foch's teaching was admirably calculated to fortify the powers of resistance and endurance—essentially defensive qualities. Yet, paradoxically, he made himself the advocate of the offensive. All his teaching converged on the idea of "organising a shock both supreme and final." Here, as in his historical illustrations, one can trace the influence of Captain Gilbert, an influence none the less significantly perceptible because unacknowledged as a source. Any French military lecturer in the 'nineties needed dexterity to achieve such omission.

For Gilbert had stamped on the military mind of France his deduction that Bazaine and the defensive were chiefly responsible for the defeat of 1870. A classmate of Joffre's at the Polytechnique, although a star twinkling high above him, Gilbert had come to be regarded as the destined chief of his generation when disease cut short his army career. It could not quench his spirit nor his power. He would still be the man of destiny, even though he exchanged the sword for the pen. The initials "G. G." soon became famous in military literature. Grouard, who also left the army to devote himself to writing and became the most penetrating interpreter of Napoleonic strategy, has recorded of Gilbert: "Almost all his judgments became those of the *Ecole de Guerre* and of the Historical Section of the General Staff, which was only an emanation of him."

One may add that Grouard, a stern realist, served the cause of truth so straitly in his historical writings that he became increasingly unpopular with those who were responsible for the military education of officers. Gilbert, in contrast, flattered the vanity of military France by his clarion call for a revival of the *furia francese* and by the consoling simplicity that marked his explanation of 1870. He became the prophet of the offensive. Foch would be the vocal chord that linked Gilbert with the school of Grandmaison, the final prophet of the *offensive à outrance* and the precipitator of disaster in 1914.

Foch's middle position, however, symbolised his relatively less extreme committal to this all too simple theory. If he was over-ready to believe that the offensive was an infallible remedy

in all circumstances, he prescribed certain precautions in the way it was injected. As Bonnal's successor, it was natural that he should adopt Bonnal's theory of the advanced guard. But he also adapted it, giving a more elastic sense to an idea that tended to become geometrical. He instilled the necessity of "fixing" the enemy as a safeguard to the offensive and a preliminary to manœuvre. The advanced guard would form the eyes and the arms of the main body. One must grip the enemy by the throat before attempting the knock-out blow—which might otherwise hit the air. Depicting this action in terms of personal combat, in his lectures Foch used forceful gestures to enhance his striking metaphors. And by the physical demonstration he unconsciously emphasised the essentially tactical trend of his teaching.

This problem of *sûreté*—of sure information and secure movement in delivering the offensive—fills the greater part of his two books. He treats it through historical examples examined at great length. Far the largest section of the *Principes de la Guerre* is devoted—contrary to his title—to a microscopic tactical study of the action of a small Prussian advanced guard at Nachod in 1866. For his material, Foch appears to have owed an unacknowledged debt to Kuhne's critical study of this episode.

Foch's second book, *La Conduite de la Guerre*, has more sequence of argument and of subject. It avoids the pitfalls of the first because its scope is confined to one serial example—the first phase of the 1870 campaign. The field had been minutely if still incompletely surveyed by numerous French and German military historians, and Foch profited by the result to produce a study which admirably suited him—that of a directing general at work, hour by hour and day by day. While sympathetically appraising many of Moltke's good points, Foch found the explanation of all his misadventures in a neglect to fulfil the principle of *sûreté*. Moltke would have fared better if, instead of trying to gauge by reason what the French would do, he had used a general advanced guard to find and fix them. He was too apt, in Foch's view, to act upon preconceived ideas. But German errors were often redeemed, as those of the French were not, by the initiative of subordinate commanders, whose intelligent team-work led

them to take steps that fulfilled the spirit of their orders when the latter did not fit the circumstances. To examples of such "intellectual discipline" Foch gave the greatest emphasis and his highest praise.

The reader of Foch's books feels that the author turns with relief from the philosophy of war to these concrete cases, a descent from the clouds to seemingly solid ground. His stance might have been truer, however, if it had been wider. In his study of *sûreté* his mind was concentrated too exclusively on the problem of ensuring that the attack reached its target. He was too little concerned with what would happen then, or too ready to assume that the target, like the familiar hinged plate on peacetime rifle-ranges, would fall with a clatter. He pictured an enemy who would be trying to evade the blow rather than an enemy who might be waiting, solidly and ready, to repel the blow. He was so intent to ensure that the blow should travel on a direct line to the target, without interruption on its course, that he did not pause to meditate the need of weakening the target's resistance.

The psychology of the indirect approach was by him unexplored. So far as he considered the indirect approach, it was merely as a geographical line to the enemy's flank.

Here we can trace the effect of his limited historical study. His teaching gave little heed to the possibilities of the defensive-offensive, to the idea, most fruitful in history, of inducing the enemy to exhaust himself in a fruitless assault and then launching a counter-stroke. It was significant that while proclaiming Napoleon as the supreme master, Foch omitted any analysis of his supreme battlepiece—Austerlitz. It was significant, too, that he completely ignored Wellington and the methods that had brought him success.

Adopting the offensive as the essential form of action, Foch's sequence of action was, first, to feel for one's enemy, then to grip him; finally to "strike one supreme stroke on one point," using one's reserve "as a club" which, by its weight and momentum, would shatter one part of the enemy's array, one link in his chain of organisation, so leading to a general collapse.

This theory, essentially mechanistic or mathematical, was too simple for truth. It comes curiously from the lips of one who had proclaimed the supremacy of moral factors. But its fallacy was exposed, above all, by a material factor—the modern development of weapons. Calculated to achieve success by a skilled mechanical process of concentrating superior numbers at one point, the formula would be nullified by the mechanical progress which made one man sitting behind a machine-gun the superior of a hundred or more who were advancing upon him with a bayonet. The more ranks of attackers, the more swaths of dead. It was no use to concentrate a reserve five or ten ranks deep at a point held by only one line of defenders, if your first line could not break through that one line. In the face of this difficulty the mechanistic theory broke down in 1914-18. To break the line one had to revive, if also to adapt, the old ruses and tricks of surprise practised throughout the ages.

Foch's misconception was in part due to a misplaced belief that "any improvement in fire-arms is bound to add strength to the offensive." He arrived at this astonishing conclusion by the purely mathematical argument that if one launched 2,000 men against 1,000 when both sides were armed with a weapon firing one shot a minute, there was a margin of 1,000 shots in favour of the attacker, whereas if armed with a weapon firing ten shots a minute the margin would be increased to 10,000. This ignored such practical matters as the modern defenders' ability to fire from behind cover and with more careful aim while their assailants are exposed.

In a too apt simile Foch compared his method of examining historical cases to the scientist's use of a microscope. The fundamental fault of his study was that it was too microscopic. It was concentrated on such examples from the campaigns of Napoleon and Moltke as suited his theory, and ignored the rest of history. If he had examined the American Civil War he would have seen clear evidence of the growing power of defence over attack, and renewed evidence that fighting was not the only means to victory.

In another simile he compared his doctrine to a "bonfire lighted on a dangerous coast to assist doubtful navigators."

F O C H, THE MAN OF O R L E A N S

But, because of his tendency to discount the influence of armament and the necessity of surprise, it proved a wrecker's lantern which led the navigators of military France among shoals where they ran aground and almost foundered. For the generation of his pupils, running to extremes as is the way of disciples, exalted the will to conquer into a catch-phrase specific for victory. Obsessed with the virtues of the offensive, they came to believe that they had only to attack with sufficient fervour to be certain of conquering. Thus it was left for August, 1914, to show that bullets—the hardest of facts—can overcome the will of the commander by shattering the bodies of his men.*

* A fuller analysis, for students, of Foch's teachings on war is given in Appendix I.

Chapter IV

THE PLAYTHINGS OF FATE

WHILE FOCH, in his chair at the Ecole de Guerre, was wrapped in contemplation of war, a storm had been gathering overhead. Soon it was to break with a peal of thunder that shattered, not merely his reveries, but his position—and, almost, his future career.

This storm was the reversed sequel of one that had earlier wrecked the career of a man who had been with him on the General Staff—Alfred Dreyfus. As the one was the victim of anti-clericalism, so the other had been the victim of anti-Semitism. This movement, a late growth in France, had gathered vengeful strength from the Jewish share in the defeat of Boulanger's dream of a military *coup d'état*, and from Jewish implication in the Panama scandal.

Then one day in October, 1894, the anti-Semitic organ *La Libre Parole*, made the sensational first announcement that a Jewish officer of the General Staff, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, had been arrested on a charge of selling French military secrets to a foreign power—Germany. To allay the thirst of its readers for further news and fresh Jew-baiting, the paper developed an attack on the Minister of War for his assumed desire, as a republican, to shield such a military traitor. Joy was released and hatred unleashed by the official announcement that a court-martial, sitting in secret, had convicted Dreyfus and sentenced him to lifelong imprisonment. In January he was publicly paraded and degraded, stripped of his buttons and badges before being taken away to the transport which would bear him to the aptly and awesomely named Devil's Island, off the coast of French Guiana. While the mob howled in execration, some more

concrete-minded patriots sought to point the lesson by applying dynamite to the summary excavation of the Rothschild bank. Frenzy carried to an extreme even united the two extremes—Royalists and Socialists. For the latter, subsequently the defenders of Dreyfus, at first found grievance in the wealth of the Dreyfus family—a slight lapse of logic on their part in view of the motive for his alleged crime. They complained that this richly connected officer merely suffered transportation, whereas a common soldier would have been shot. Outside his family Dreyfus at first found few friends. In a land where the law presumes guilt until innocence is proved, no public feeling was aroused by secrecy of trial and ignorance of evidence.

Unhappily for their object, the fanatical anti-Dreyfusards sought to stamp out the embers of doubt by providing the public with evidence. A facsimile of the *Bordereau*—a list of documents which Dreyfus was said to have prepared for the German military attaché—was published in the Press. This too clever move gave his friends the possibility of challenge, and gave others the possibility of doubt whether this list was in his handwriting. From this clue sprang volcanic consequences.

Meanwhile, a new chief had been appointed to the Intelligence Branch of the General Staff. This Colonel Picquart suffered from a Gentile conscience that was troublesome and a desire for truth that was inconvenient—to his superiors. He studied the dossier of the trial and doubted its justice. Disbelief in the guilt of Dreyfus was followed by suspicion of a Commandant Esterhazy, as the real author of the *Bordereau* and purveyor of secrets. But on raising the question with his own chief, Picquart met with a cold reception. Better that the guilty should escape than that the innocent should be saved at the expense of the Army's reputation for justice. To reopen the case would reveal the fallibility of the military hierarchy, and give an opening to hostile political elements. Picquart persisted. So the authorities sought a solution by sending him on a dangerous African expedition. Death might silence doubt.

As a further precaution, hints were dropped of the discovery of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine the solidity of the Army.

But Picquart, before leaving, had also taken a precaution. He had told his lawyer of his discovery. The Dreyfus party was fortified, and its numbers grew. Then fresh "revelations" by authority, intended as sedatives, became emetics. For they showed that the conviction of Dreyfus had been based partly on documents that were not shown to his counsel. It meant that the Ministry of War had virtually suborned the judges, without giving the accused a chance of disproof and defence, in violation of the elements of justice. Worse still, some of these privily shown documents were forgeries.

Late in 1897 Dreyfus's brother, armed with accumulated evidence, denounced Esterhazy to the Minister of War. His action was reinforced politically by a Protestant Senator, whose espousal of the cause made the clerical party and Press more bitterly anti-Dreyfus and anti-Semitic.

The Government conceded the court-martial of Esterhazy but declared that the Dreyfus case "no longer existed." And the Army took care that Esterhazy was acquitted. It was then that Zola stepped into the arena with a scathing open letter of denunciation—*J'accuse*—which, because of its deadly charges and his literary fame, startled the world. In retaliation he was prosecuted for libel, was driven to flee from France. He at least escaped more lightly than Picquart, who, having safely returned to France, there to renew his efforts on behalf of Dreyfus, was, for the safety of the General Staff, imprisoned without trial. Most astonishing of all, the majority of the public gave their sympathy and support to the military authorities, who had made shrewd appeal to patriotism, raising the cry of "The country is in danger," and posing as the one sound organ in a corrupt country. For a time they succeeded. Many of the people had lost faith in Parliament, in financiers, and in the Church. Only the Army was left as an object for faith, and to this they clung desperately. Generals and court-martial judges were popular heroes. But the revulsion was the worse when it came, and the Army paid the penalty—for putting authority above truth.

The first crack came in August, 1898. The new civilian Minister of War had just produced fresh proofs of Dreyfus's

guilt, so convincing that Parliament ordered them to be placarded throughout France. But the Minister himself was less convinced by these papers provided by his advisers. A re-examination revealed that they were forgeries. Colonel Henry, Picquart's successor as Chief of the Intelligence, then confessed that he had forged them, and after being placed under arrest was found with his throat cut.

The outcry of the Dreyfusards, already supported by the powerful pen of Clemenceau, was now more widely taken up by Socialists anxious to discredit the Army and the Church. This hardened the resistance and the hearts of the military chiefs. Dreyfus became a pawn in the struggle for and against the Army. The political life of France was convulsed by the clamour of faction. Rumours of military plots against the Republic became rife and were fostered by actual attempts to induce the military to evict the President. Ministries rose and fell with more than normal rapidity. Meantime the case of Dreyfus had been sent for review to the Court of Cassation, the supreme civil court, which quashed the proceedings and ordered a retrial.

The new court-martial assembled at Rennes, whither Dreyfus was brought back from Devil's Island. The military judges showed a consistency of conviction but not a consistency of reason. For, by a majority, they reaffirmed his guilt but found "extenuating circumstances," and reduced his punishment to ten years' detention. If they hoped, by this compromise of truth and logic, to preserve the rightness of authority they signally failed. The inconsequence was too palpable. The Government intervened by advising the President of the Republic to pardon Dreyfus. If this was a further breach of logic, it at least warded off further breach of the peace, as well as satisfying a majority of the public who had grown sick of tumult. Another six years was to pass before, in a calm atmosphere, the innocence of Dreyfus was judicially established, and in slight atonement he and Picquart were restored to the Army with a step in rank.

More immediate was the political reaction of the crisis. By ranging the Army and the Church against the Republic it gave the Socialist party a hold on and in the Government. This posi-

tion in turn produced a drastic campaign to curb the Church and cleanse the Army, a campaign that was watched apathetically by a populace whose sympathy they had forfeited. The people, indeed, were the more ready to support Parliament in strong action because their loss of faith in it had been due essentially to its habit of inaction.

Unhappily, this action merely swung to the other extreme—from persecution of the Jews to persecution of the Catholics. General André, becoming Minister of War, applied an anti-clerical purge. The Ecole de Guerre, as the educational pulpit of the Army, came early under his scrutiny.

Foch, as a certain Catholic and an uncertain republican, was one of those who fell under the ban. The definite fact that his brother was a Jesuit weighted the scales against him, and mere indefiniteness of political views could not redress the balance.

Nor did his punishment end with the banishment to Laon—as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 29th Regiment of Artillery—in October, 1901. For although he had been recommended for promotion, General André withheld it. Foch had to wait another three years for his colonelcy, performing the limited functions of a second-in-command in a small garrison town.

“ My career seemed ruined, badly compromised at the least, and if I had nourished the least illusion in this respect comrades took care to undeceive me : ‘ Oh ! ’ they chaffed me, ‘ you can ignore the present régime, you can take your Easter sacraments and follow your processions as much as you like—but in that case you will never be promoted Colonel.’ ‘ And you,’ I replied, ‘ do you expect to avoid trouble by cringing and by crying, “ Down with the priests ! ” ? All right ! Go on doing so, if your heart tells you. But as for me, whatever happens I’m not going to change my ways.’ ” Nor did he.

When comrades who had suffered similarly spoke of resigning their commissions, he argued that such an act would be desertion. “ You have no pluck ! When war comes you will have to put up with worse things than that ! If you can’t stand it now, what will you do then ? ”

If he was depressed he did not waver. Still less did he seek to

ingratiate himself with the powers in Paris. To a comrade of Polytechnique days who had become a military publicist, he wrote at this time: "I rarely go to Paris; asking nothing of anyone, and waiting calmly until I am sent to another post." Such a phrase is so often coined by those who beg that it is, at first sound, suspect. But this friend, Colonel Mayer, was convinced that the coin rang true. And his critical distrust of Foch's teaching lends weight to his favourite judgment of Foch's character. There is significance in his verdict that if Foch "did not work for himself, if he was not ambitious for his own advancement, he strove for the triumph of his ideas." This comment provides a clue to the future, in tracing the devious paths of Foch's war career.

His exile at Laon did not quench his faith in his mission, and he utilised his leisure to work up some of his Ecole de Guerre lectures into a book which would both preserve and spread his gospel. Soon after the *Principes de la Guerre* was published, in 1903, he referred to it in a letter, with deeper truth than he realised, as "a work of faith rather than of science."

How strange that Laon should have been the scene of its preparation! How ominous as a place of inspiration! For there in 1814, Napoleon, advancing from the Chemin-des-Dames, suffered a defeat at the hands of the Prussians from which he failed to recover before the entry of the invaders into Paris sealed his fate. That Foch should have come to Laon as his place of military exile seems fresh fulfilment of that destiny which, as if in relativity, brought these two along parallel courses. And from this locality, fifteen years later, the Germans were to strike at the Chemin-des-Dames, delivering the severest blow that Foch suffered when in supreme command of the Allied Armies. From that stroke he but narrowly recovered, and by that stroke Paris was endangered. Well might it seem that an inimical spirit brooded over Laon.

Scarcely less sinister in atmosphere was his next destination, Vannes, whither he was sent to command the 35th Regiment of Artillery in 1903 on his belated promotion to Colonel. Vannes in Morbihan, close to the Biscayan coast, was pervaded with

grim, eerie memories of the Chouan revolt against the Red Terror. Its superstitious, fanatically Catholic people still wore the secretively defiant air stamped on their forebears by persecution and repression. The very buildings bore uneffaced traces of that struggle, wherein flagrant brutality was combated by mysterious atrocity. And when Foch arrived the sullenness of a resentful people had just been deepened by the arbitrary closing of the Jesuit College.

Had he been sent there to test his loyalty to the Republic? Was his colonel's command in such an uneasy spot proffered as the rope with which he was invited to hang himself? He himself had, and retained, such suspicions. It was significant, too, that he was placed under a staunchly Protestant superior, General Millet. But those who may have so cleverly contrived this trap made a slip. They perhaps forgot that years earlier Foch had been a pupil of Millet at the Ecole de Guerre.

"If they believed that ruffled feelings, that clashes between us would be caused by our divergent beliefs, if they had perhaps counted on such, they were thoroughly deceived. Millet was fully aware of my religious opinions, he knew that I had a Jesuit brother. But he also knew other things about me. . . . In short, if I am now a Marshal of France, it is to this Protestant without fanaticism that I owe it; my path blocked, it was he who opened it. . . . And he is the source of my military success, completed by Joffre and Clemenceau."

At Vannes, fortified by such sympathy and confidence, Foch strove to develop the gunnery standard of his new regiment. His practical bent and objective habit of thought made him impatient of routine duties and, still more, of the outward smartness upon which peace-time soldiering tends so much to be concentrated. As a regimental commander, he applied to his task his inherent and inevitable question: "*De quoi s'agit-il?*" And the answer, to his mind, was clearly: "To teach his men to fire their guns." Before this essential all other considerations had to give way, and he was apt to be impatient of all range-orders and administrative calls which seemed to obstruct rather than assist his end. He had this period in mind when, at the end of his life,

he wrote : " To command troops is certainly the greatest pleasure of military life, but above all is this so when one is a captain or a colonel. For the captain, by reason of his immediate contact with the rank and file . . . ; for the colonel, because of the influence he exerts on a body of officers. . . . It is through his officers that a colonel moulds his regiment so that it becomes the very image of its commander."

One personal convenience of being stationed at Vannes was the opportunity it gave him to slip over to Treufoctunou on leave, there to refresh his mind by tending his garden. His spells of leave, too, were used in preparing a second volume of his *Ecole de Guerre* lectures for publication. More consecutive and more concrete than his first book, because it was a day by day analysis of the German leadership in 1870, it appeared in 1905 under the title *De la Conduite de la Guerre*.

That year brought him a change of scene. General Millet had been appointed to the command of the V Army Corps at Orleans, and he paid tribute to Foch's work at Vannes by obtaining his transfer to be his chief of staff. At Orleans, Foch was happy in his enlarged scope and in his continued service under Millet.

Moreover, he had once again come to a site full of historical and symbolical associations—this time of happier history and symbolism. At Orleans had begun the *Revanche* which immortalised the name of Joan of Arc. More recently, it had been in 1870 the focus of that uprising of the French people in arms which so nearly retrieved the collapse of the French professional army. If the campaign of the *Défense Nationale* had ultimately failed, largely because the wine of new service was poured into the bottle of old generalship, it had severely jarred the German war machine, and had done much to rebuild French prestige from the wreckage of Sedan. Thus Orleans was a site of inspiration and suggestion.

Millet lost no opportunity of pointing the lesson—that the Germans had limitations. And, as Foch confessed later, it was Millet who taught him "that we ought not to fear them." "They know their trade, they are professional soldiers, but we can do as well as they."

Millet, too, was fond of preaching the cult of adaptability, and argued that to train for war over the probable scene of war was likely to develop preconceived ideas—and a preconceived plan. "General Millet was always telling me—'What is wrong with Conseil Supérieur is that all the generals composing it have held the Nancy command. They know every inch of the ground there. They have studied every position—the Grand Couronné, the Haricot de X——, Z Ridge. The battle of Nancy! That is the only one for which they have prepared.'"

Millet's wisdom was to be proved, too well, in August, 1914. His remark gives us a clue, generally ignored, to the preconceived basis of the now notorious Plan XVII, and to the cause of the blind eye that the French command turned to the manifold signs of the German enveloping sweep through Belgium. They had trained for the decisive battle in Lorraine; hence the decisive battle must come in Lorraine.

That Foch himself profited by Millet's insistence on elasticity is clear in the light of history. That he might have profited more is no less clear. He became more adaptable as the war progressed, as hard blows dissolved hardening conceptions. If in the earlier stages he seemed to forget his Ecole de Guerre cry of "no preconceptions," is it partially to be traced to the fact that on the eve of the war Foch himself held the Nancy command?

Promotion to the rank of general of brigade came at last in June, 1907. At the age of fifty-six Foch reached the rank which Napoleon attained at twenty-four—what a world of difference in this comparison, the difference, peradventure, between Napoleonic war and "modern" war!

Upon his promotion he was given command of the artillery of the V Corps. But his tenure was brief. General Bonnal was about to vacate the post of Commandant of the Ecole de Guerre, which he had received shortly before Foch's dismissal from his professorial chair. Earlier still Bonnal had been Foch's predecessor in that chair. Perhaps the coincidence seemed to Foch propitious, suggesting to his mind a second coincidence of succession.

Foch certainly cherished the desire for such a post and its influence on military thought, and in Millet he found both a

sympathiser and a promoter of his purpose. Millet happened to be an intimate friend of Picquart, who had just been made not only a general but Minister of War. This dramatic atonement for the past, for the sacrifice of his career in the cause of truth, was due to Clemenceau, who, in October, 1906, had become Prime Minister.

Millet, who was as anxious as Foch to put the teaching of war on a higher plane, sought to impress on Picquart that Foch was the ideal choice as Bonnal's successor. He came back full of hope that the idea would mature. But clouds gathered on the horizon. After the usual review of troops on the National Fête Day, July 14th, Millet broke the news to Foch. "Yesterday, I had lunch at the Rue Saint Dominique. I wanted to know from Picquart how your nomination as Commandant of the Ecole de Guerre was going on. Picquart replied: 'I'm extremely sorry; nothing can be done. Clemenceau does not want Foch.' 'And for what reason?' 'For all the reasons that you know as well as I do.'" But after recounting this damping conversation Millet struck a brighter note. "We are not beaten. Nothing is lost, as long as we act promptly. You will catch the train for Paris and present yourself tomorrow morning to Clemenceau, as sent by me. You will put your case to him. He'll give you a rating. You'll attract him in spite of himself. Splendid! He's a man who loathes people who flinch. You're the same. You're both made for each other."

So next morning Foch made his way to the "Tiger's" den through the unnaturally quiet streets of a city still sleeping off the fatigue of its revels. To him it seemed an ominous hush. A young doorkeeper growled, "The Prime Minister is not receiving. . . . In any case there's a Cabinet meeting due now."

"Give him my card all the same." The man grumblingly did as he was bid, and came back with a wonder-struck air: "The Prime Minister will see you." But a sarcastic curl of the lip seemed to say: "You want to see the Tiger; you damned well will."

As Foch passed in, Clemenceau did not rise to receive him.

Instead, he sat bristling, couched to spring like his namesake, and shot out the sharp questions: "What have you come here for? Who's told you to see me?"

"General Millet, Prime Minister."

"I haven't told him to do so," Clemenceau retorted.

"That's correct. But he has told me of your attitude towards me, of the objections you've raised against my nomination to the command of the Ecole de Guerre. And it's he who has insisted that I should come and give an account of myself to you."

"All right! Let's have it."

"Have you any complaint against me as a soldier, Prime Minister?"

"No, you're a good officer and you've got the confidence of your superiors. That's not the point."

"What is the point, then? My religious opinions? I don't deny them. That my brother is a Jesuit? That's a fact."

"That your brother is a Jesuit doesn't matter, nor your personal beliefs."

"What is the matter, then?"

According to Foch, Clemenceau skilfully evaded the charge, and drew the conversation into a general discourse on domestic and European affairs. They had been talking for fifty minutes. It was twenty-five minutes past nine, and the Cabinet meeting should have begun at nine. Foch, tenaciously holding on, felt it was time to pull in the rein.

"Now, Prime Minister, as regards myself, what's your decision?"

"Ah! If it was a question of a troop command, I would soon give it to you. But the command of the Ecole de Guerre, that's another matter, that's too critical a matter. And, to begin with, what would you teach there?"

"What I've already taught there and have embodied in my two treatises published by Berger-Levrault."

"I don't know them."

"Allow me to send you them."

Foch said good-bye, went to his publishers, despatched.

the volumes to Clemenceau, and caught the train back to Orleans.

He heard nothing further for a couple of months. Then, at the army manœuvres in September, Picquart saw him and told him that he must rub in certain lessons at the Ecole de Guerre. "What! At the Ecole de Guerre! Am I going there?" "So it seems. Clemenceau has read your books. He swears not at you but by you now, and you are his man."

But betwixt cup and lip there was nearly a slip. On September 25th the papers contained an announcement of Foch's nomination to the command of the Ecole de Guerre. But next day the Official Gazette was blank. There had evidently been protests and a last hour postponement. A full week passed without news. Then, on October 3rd, came a telegram from Clemenceau, summoning Foch to Paris.

It was a Sunday. So once more he arrived at an ominously quiet building. If Clemenceau's greeting was more pleasant than the first time his opening words were more shattering of hope.

"There's nothing doing. I wanted to appoint you. It seems to be impossible. There's a dossier against you, a complete dossier—look!" Clemenceau pointed to a bulky file. He opened it, and read: "Reports of the Prefects on General Foch. From the Prefect of the Aisne—'A very distinguished officer, but a doubtful republican.' Humph! You see. What have you got to say?"

"Nothing. Or rather, I ask for preciseness, for facts. Are there any?"

"Wait, I will look. . . . No, there are only appreciations, not facts."

"And is that what you call a complete dossier?"

According to Foch, this thrust made an impression. But its visible result was for the moment only to make Clemenceau change his ground.

"We'll leave aside the Prefects' reports. There are graver charges. Here, for example—'This officer, during his professorship at the Ecole de Guerre, virtually taught metaphysics—and metaphysics so abstruse that it made idiots of a number

of his pupils. Even General Bonnal himself asked for his removal.' ”

“ If that charge is true, Prime Minister, I must be a man of the type of Jourdain who made prose without knowing it. It can only be in that way that I have taught metaphysics, for I don't know what they are.”

Once more, according to Foch, this reply pleased Clemenceau, and even drew from him the admission that he had found no abstruseness in Foch's books. But, once more also he produced another charge out of the conjurer's dossier.

“ This officer, in his annual gradings, has always favoured pupils who have come from clerical colleges to the detriment of the others.” As a reinforcement to this charge a slip of paper was attached, being headed by the name of Colonel de Grandmaison.

“ Ten names, Prime Minister. And more than seven hundred pupils have passed through my hands.”

This last rejoinder seems to have convinced Clemenceau of Foch's integrity, or at least to have shaken his faith in the consistency of the dossier, which, Foch declared, had been compiled by General Toutée, the War Minister's *chef du Cabinet*, in order “ to trump up a case ” against him. According to rumour, Toutée was himself the chief rival candidate for the post.

Next day Foch's appointment to the Ecole de Guerre appeared in the Official Gazette, dated as from October 8th, 1908. It was the perfect atonement for his treatment in 1900. “ After being thrown out through the window I came back through the front door.” His satisfaction was the greater because this personal *revanche* not merely gave him the opportunity to prepare the instruments for the national *Revanche*, but seemed to foreshadow it. His work and his country's military renaissance were now more than ever identified in his mind. The phoenix was rising from the ashes.

How prophetic that Orleans should have been the place where Foch's fortune was reborn, the place whence he came to his mission of moulding the military mind of France for the armed hour of her redemption. And even the time of his coming had

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its symbolical significance. For the year 1908 had witnessed the publication of Anatole France's critical and anti-clerical *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*, aimed to demolish a legend. Foch's advent to power and to Paris might be conceived as the riposte; the answer of France to Anatole France. And Foch himself, as a male reincarnation—the Man of Orleans.

Chapter V

THE MISSION AND THE MOULD

FOCH was back at the Ecole de Guerre, and had mounted to the summit. As a pulpit this was not so direct or so intimate a standpoint for teaching as his former chair. His influence was now exerted chiefly in directing the teachers. As in making a fresh negative from an old print, this second-hand interpretation of his doctrine subtly blurred its outline, while the inevitable retouching by other hands produced a different emphasis. Thus, in this second period at the Ecole de Guerre it was more the spirit than the mind of Foch that was diffused.

One should not ignore, moreover, the effect of eight more years' peace soldiering on his own mind, the mind of a man now well on in the fifties. The lectures embodied in his first book had revealed him as struggling to crystallise his own thought, to develop a definite structure. The second book had attained a more definite form, but in detail rather than in fundamental. It suggested that he had postponed his search for a philosophy of war, his attempt to establish the foundations of his philosophy, in order first to gather further materials for brick-making. A wise preliminary, suggesting that his mind was awakening to the scale of his constructive task.

But then came the break in his career, and consignment to labours of routine. And there is no sign, no further publication, to hint that he tried to complete his philosophical research. It is not easy for a man turned fifty, still less for a man untrained to research, to carry through such a labour—that may involve an unforeseen scale of destruction as preliminary to an unforeseeable volume of construction. Least easy of all is it in a profession of action, where active duty interferes with reflection, where in-

tellest is valued only as expressed in action, where philosophical doubt is instinctively viewed as a possible detriment to action.

Did Foch abandon his search—or perhaps never really pursue it? Was he content with the exploration he had made, and content to assume that another war would be so parallel in conditions to 1870 that he had gone far enough when he found where the leadership in that war had gone wrong? The inference is strengthened not only by the nature of his second book, but by the fact that his second was his last.

Further confirmation comes from the preface which he wrote in 1909 for the second edition of the *Conduite de la Guerre*. It was written to reconcile his deductions with the most recent experience of war, the Russo-Japanese War.

In this preface he first points out the difference between such a war and one in Europe. Whilst he is logical in arguing that, in comparison, the bad roads and few railways in Manchuria hindered strategic deployments and movements, it does not seem to follow that, as he argues, these conditions prevented “thunderbolt strokes.” Rather does his comment seem to underrate the willingness of the Japanese soldier to cast away his life in the assault. Foch then asserts that in the Russo-Japanese War “the existence of the two opposing nations was not at stake, but only their future.” “In consequence”—rather comprehensive consequence, one would suggest—“its lessons are neither complete nor of immediate interest for us; it is not a pattern for us to copy.”

Unfortunately for Foch and a myriad others, its indecisive pattern was to be repeated all too faithfully. What Foch assumed to be the result of special limitations imposed on leadership, was really caused by the limitations of leadership to realise the changed conditions of warfare in general. Persuaded that the conditions had not changed, he continued his preface by showing that, within their specially limited conditions, the Japanese leaders had fulfilled his principles. “The idea of *sûreté* guided and covered all their acts.” “One sees the theory of the Napoleonic advanced guard well applied.” “When the Japanese pass to action, the spirit of the offensive inspires all their decisions. . . . In

strategy, as in tactics, they attack." But this attack is aimed at the enemy's communications or to envelop a flank, and thus repeats the manœuvre-battle of history except that it is longer drawn out, whilst strategy and tactics are more nearly merged. If the attacker has to extend his lines more widely, for such envelopment, he has the telegraph to keep control and the power of entrenchment to allow this extension without risk. Foch regarded the trench as an aid to manœuvre, and does not seem to have considered it as born of necessity, the offspring of modern fire.

Thus, he concluded, there was nothing in the experience of Manchuria to "affect the fundamental principles of the conduct of war that one has sought to bring out in this book." It contained scarcely a mention of the material side of war. Not a word of machine-guns nor of barbed wire, which might so seriously upset his calculations. His material short-sightedness was also exemplified in a comment he made in 1910 when watching the aeronautical Circuit de l'Est: "That's good sport, but for the Army the aeroplane is of no value."

As for Foch's "principles," it is curious that he should have forgotten that he had ended his list with an "etcetera," suggestive of their indefiniteness and of his still incomplete study. There is now no hint that he felt the need of completing it before the time of trial, for himself and for France, arrived. How ironically prophetic that a friend who visited him at this time should have made a casual note that he found him reading Zola's *La Débâcle*.

The apostolic fervour with which Foch propagated his doctrine sheds an important light on his character, and, by reflection, on the history of the coming war. For he recognised no other doctrine as worthy of discussion. Unlike other exponents of an authorised doctrine, he did not pay heresy the compliment of persecution. He merely, and blandly, ignored its existence.

This attitude contrasts curiously with his dictum: "We must have freedom of mind, no prejudices, no prepossessions, no fixed ideas, no opinion accepted without discussion and merely because it has always been heard or practised. There should be one test only: reason." Yet there is no sign that Foch ever stooped to

reason when confronted with criticisms of his faith in the offensive. Instead, he cries: "No victory without fighting." "It is to the theory of decision by arms that war is now wholly returning; one can now apply no other." "No strategy can henceforth prevail over that which aims at ensuring tactical results, victory by fighting." "Modern war knows but one argument, the tactical fact, battle."

Strangely incongruous words are these in the mouth of the man who later owed so much to the assistance of blockade and propaganda. Strangely do they contrast with his dictum a generation later—after he had waged war—that "air attack, by its crushing moral effect on a nation, may impress public opinion to the point of disarming the Government and thus become decisive." Where is thy "battle" now, O man of one argument? At last the horizon of the mind is widened. But why so late to use that key, given to the students of the *Ecole de Guerre*: "Learn to think"?

The reason would seem to be that the appeal to "reason" in the *Principes de la Guerre* was no more than a prefatory catchword, the sugar to coat a pill that must be swallowed, willy nilly. Foch's real thought—nay, rather, feeling—was expressed in another reference to the principles: "They will not be open to discussion once they have been established." Did neither he nor any of his hearers perceive the contradiction? And how was it possible for the teacher to stay content with establishing a vague list of principles that ended with "etcetera"? Here was surely the supreme triumph of faith and the dethronement of reason!

In the Army, and still more in the *Ecole de Guerre*, Foch's doctrine passed almost without criticism. Soldiers, especially soldiers nourished on the Napoleonic tradition, were unlikely to question the universal validity of battle. And even the doctrine of the offensive was hardly disputed; its few audible critics had either left the Army or had already reached a grade high enough to raise them out of reach of the doctrinal fanatics. The time was still to come when even the highest durst not question the sovereign efficacy of the offensive for fear of their own dethronement. That time would come when Foch's pupils had consoli-

dated their grip on the General Staff, and in a campaign of excommunication fulfilled their interpretation of his "intellectual discipline." For in practice the cult of a common mode of thought is apt to mean the suppression of all other modes as heresy, and so the end of free thought.

Inevitably in an army, rank acts as a gag. The gag may be looser or tighter according to the disposition of the superior, but it remains in the mouth of the subordinate as a hindrance to the articulation of his ideas.

Thus Foch was a preacher rather than a teacher. Speaking from a pulpit loftier than ever, he had the preacher's one-sided but two-edged advantage of being immune from challenge. And his was not an ear attuned to catch the undertones of dissent.

Outside the Army, criticism might have been less subdued. But military criticism is the least populous of professions. The critic, moreover, has so much to gain by conforming to the prevailing dogmas—if he but clothes conventional tenets in fresh verbiage his wisdom will be applauded—and so much to lose if he emphasises his inherent isolation by standing against the current. Thus, subtract from the few the fearful, and the residue of true critics may well be zero.

In France at least there were two, the foremost being Grouard. As a young officer Grouard had won the recognition of General Miribel, the rebuilder of the French Army after 1870, and had exercised an influence on the defensive-offensive plan then framed for a war against Germany. But as this plan came into disfavour, so did Grouard. The fact that he had not been through the *Ecole de Guerre* was raised as a barrier to his advancement, and the fearless candour of his books on the 1870 war raised powerful enemies against him. His military career came to a dead end, and he retired in 1900. Freedom from routine duties allowed him to devote his whole thought to the study of war and to historical research. Beyond the borders of France he attained an increasing fame, but in his own country his tendency to analyse Napoleon's weaknesses, especially in the 1813 and 1815 campaigns, made his writings increasingly unpopular with the promoters of legend and the producers of the unhistorical panegyrics which served

as textbooks for military education. These officially certified professors naturally did not encourage study of an author who challenged their superficial deductions, who brought out ugly facts which would kill their beautiful theory. Grouard was convinced that honesty was the essential attribute of history; they were persuaded that beauty came first.

The boycott became more intense when, in 1911, Grouard published a book which projected the truths drawn from the past on to the screen of the future. It would prove to be a remarkably accurate forecast of the German plan: "It is above all the offensive through Belgium on which we ought to fix our attention." And his masterly analysis of the courses open to the French would equally prove an all too prophetic warning of the dangers of the French plan that was actually attempted: "As far as one can foresee the logical consequences of the opening of our campaign, we can say without hesitation that if we take the offensive at the outset we shall be beaten, while in preparing ourselves for a riposte [against the western flank of the advancing Germans] all the chances are in our favour." Grouard's first prediction would be fulfilled in Lorraine and the Ardennes; his second on the Marne. But in their futile offensive the French leaders had dissipated the strength and the energy which might have made their riposte decisive.

A second true critic was Foch's old comrade, Mayer. As far back as 1890 he had predicted that the advent of smokeless powder and the improvement of firearms would lead to a "hide-and-seek" type of fighting—South Africa and Manchuria were to prove him correct—and had uttered warnings against the delusive charms of the "national offensive tradition."

His warnings had been not merely vain but partly unheard, for the French military journals closed their pages in oyster-like retreat from such questionings of the popular fallacy, and he had been driven to find a vent in the *Revue Militaire Suisse*.

Ten years later, fortified by the evidence of the South African War, Mayer returned to the charge, and made the significant prediction that a future war would develop into a situation which merely

"put face to face two human walls almost in contact, separated only by a strip of death, and this double wall will remain almost inert in spite of the will to advance on one side or the other, in spite of the attempts that will be made to push on.

"One of these lines, baffled frontally, will try to outflank the other. That, in its turn, will extend its front; there will be competition as to which can extend the most, so far as its resources allow. Or, at least, this would happen if it was possible to extend indefinitely. But nature presents obstacles. The line will come to a halt at the sea, at the mountains, at the frontier of a neutral country."

The sequel would thus be a long-drawn-out siege war, brought to an end by external circumstances, such as financial exhaustion, political negotiation, or the breaking of the war-weary home-front—the families of the fighting men.

"They will grow tired of seeing the armies mark time without advancing, if not without suffering grievous losses. And it is that which will put an end to the campaign rather than the great victories of other times."

This is remarkable prevision, for even if it is possible that Mayer had read the prophecies of the Polish banker, Mr. Bloch, his deductions were to prove more exact. They fit firstly the course of the Russo-Japanese War with its incomplete stabilisation, and then that of the World War.

Mayer has related that he sent a copy of his article to Foch. We do not need Mayer's assurance that it made no impression, for Foch's freedom from doubt and undisturbed serenity are manifest in his subsequently published books and their successively unchanged editions. But it is remarkable that Foch, fervent believer in his own gospel, should have rated contrary convictions so lightly that he could ask the man who held them to give his books a public blessing.

It is a coincident sidelight on his character that when Mayer challenged his fundamental theory with the criticism that it contained "even more danger than fallacy," Foch simply replied: "Don't expect reproaches from me. You will always have my unbroken friendship." Admirable, indeed, is such generosity

and gentleness of spirit. These qualities do honour to Foch the man. But in turning the other cheek to the critic who assailed him he was also turning a deaf ear to the criticism. He was eager to forgive but unwilling to discuss. The possibility of his own fallibility was blandly ignored. For his doctrine was fortified by faith rather than by reason : even the concrete and steel of the frontier forts were more penetrable.

He was not so much deaf by nature, as deafened by his own act. The years that had brought increasing authority made him more and more the preacher. And his voice tended to drown his reflection. Like his future ally, Haig, but in a different sense, the opening of the mouth cut out the action of the brain. Unlike the political orator, he had no counteractive heckling to hold the door ajar. As his eloquence gathered impetus, his thick-set figure vibrated, his rather heavy features lightened, his speech quickened, his sentences shortened. He seemed to be driven by an inward dynamo which sent the strong, pulsating current of his creed into the mind of his hearers, stirring in them an emotional response so forceful that it shut off the more intellectual and analytical compartments of the mind. His appeal was, above all, to that part of the mind which is popularly called the heart. The spark was so strong that it obscured his obscurities of phrase, that it jumped across the gaps in his argument, that it made irrelevance appear to be sequence.

A man of action, speech was his mode of action. In it he was irresistible because he was insusceptible to doubt. Passionately convinced of his own convictions, his freedom from inward questioning quelled in others the liberty of questioning him. To understand Foch the soldier we must understand Foch the Catholic.

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The most concrete achievement of Foch's time as Commandant was not within the sphere of the Ecole de Guerre, but in an upward extension of its influence. One of the motives underlying his appointment, and a subject of discussion between Picquart and Millet, had been that of giving a higher intellectual training

to the men who were likely to rise to high command, a training that would lift them out of the rut of peace-time routine and focus their minds on the wider questions of strategy.

Foch was enthusiastically in favour of the idea, if he conceived it more as a means of creating a band of chosen disciples who would carry his gospel into the higher commands of the Army. This idea seems to have determined the original form of the "Centre of Higher Military Studies," in which at the end of the normal Ecole de Guerre courses, fifteen of the students were selected for a third year's special instruction. After one year's trial the course was cancelled, on the ground that the officers were too immature to profit by it, but it was revived by conversion into a course for the pick of the battalion commanders and lieutenant-colonels.

This organ of advanced study which Foch created had early gained the nickname of the "School for Marshals." It was to be an academic substitute for the school of practical experience in which Napoleon's marshals had been trained. But the Napoleonic suggestion had for political palates a suspiciously imperialistic flavour, all the more pronounced perhaps because the rank of marshal had disappeared with the passing of the Second Empire. Thus the newly created school drew violent attacks. Less audible, but better founded were the military doubts as to its method of study. Was it to be a centre of free discussion and research, or merely a forcing house for the intensive cultivation of the authorised seeds of military thought, a means whereby "intellectual discipline" might be tightened among the higher commanders? In the outcome the last was certainly the effect, for good or ill.

On the credit side one item must certainly be placed. For its existence made possible the appointment as Foch's chief staff officer of a man who had not been through the Ecole de Guerre, a man whose presence at his side gave him ballast. If the *Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires* had not been created, and thereby provided Weygand with a staff qualification, it is inconceivable that Foch would have found, when war came, his essential complement and right hand.

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Great as was the influence of Foch's appointment to the Ecole de Guerre upon the French Army, its most far-reaching effect was not in France but in England. There is no exaggeration in saying that it diverted the course of English history—because it revolutionised the traditional war policy of the island kingdom. This revolution can be traced to the personal influence of Foch on one Irishman.

Chapter VI

TWO REVOLUTIONS

ONE morning early in December, 1909, a tall, angular, big-nosed Irishman, who humorously called himself "the ugliest man in the British Army," arrived at the door of the Ecole de Guerre. His name was Brigadier-General Henry Wilson; his post, that of Commandant of the Staff College at Camberley; his purpose, to study the methods of his French opposite number—and, not less, the man himself. For the name of Foch had become known in England. Each year the Senior Division students at the Staff College visited the battlefields of 1870, and Foch's partial analysis of this campaign in his books had proved useful to the instructors in working up the subject. Thus on Wilson's side there was an eager curiosity to meet the author. It was scarcely reciprocated. Foch had accepted rather than welcomed the proposed visit. He had little curiosity as to the British Army, a consequence partly of his limited study of military history if also because he shared the common Continental view that there was nothing to learn from the Boer War, and felt that an army which had been so baffled by mere burghers could not be worthy of serious attention.

Wilson was met by a couple of staff officers and led to the Commandant's house, where his first impression of Foch was of a rather contemptuous little man with an impolitely inattentive manner. After the morning had been spent in listening to lectures, Foch said good-bye to his visitor with a cordiality that conveyed relief. But Wilson replied that he would be returning after lunch. In the afternoon further lectures were followed by tea, and this, by an informal talk that stretched out over a couple of hours. A charm of manner that shone through the haze of his

still imperfect French helped Wilson to thaw his host's manner, and Foch was thus the more agreeably resigned to Wilson's announcement of a return next day. This was to produce, significantly, an unreserved talk about combined action between the French and British Armies. It is also of historical note that Wilson made a diary note—"His appreciation of the German move through Belgium is exactly the same as mine, the important line being between Verdun and Namur." This note is evidence of Foch's foresight, for it suggests that in his opinion the Germans would seek a way round the fortified barrier of eastern France by traversing neutral territory. But it also suggests short-sight, in that Foch's gaze was fixed east of the Meuse, on Belgian Luxembourg rather than on the main plain of Belgium—through which in August, 1914, the wheeling mass of the German right wing made its passage.

The "entente," now "cordiale," between the two men imperceptibly developed into an alliance. In January Wilson paid a fresh visit to the Ecole de Guerre. Callwell, the editor of his diaries, points to this visit as the probable occasion when Wilson put the leading question: "What would you say was the smallest British force that would be of any practical assistance to you in the event of a contest such as we have been considering?" To this Foch instantly replied: "A single private soldier; and we would take good care that he was killed."

If this retort, witty but profound, suggests that Foch had gauged the national character of Britain, her mingled pride and tenacity, it also suggests that he regarded the British Regular Army as chiefly a lever by which he could throw the whole weight of the British nation into the scales of the Continental balance. And to this purpose he bound Wilson as a devoted servant. The influence of Wilson's charm on Foch may have been the earlier to be exerted, but that of Foch went further and was the stronger.

A first symptom was that Wilson introduced Ecole de Guerre practices into the conduct of tactical schemes at Camberley. His imagination had been fired by the way the French instructors sought to create the rush and stress of battle conditions by cries of "Vite! Vite!" and "Allez! Allez!" to spur the students

towards quick solutions. Transplanted to England, the method came to be distinguished from the past chiefly by the words "Allez! Allez!" being put at the head of the schemes, a title irreverently transformed into "Ally Sloper schemes."

In June Foch paid a return visit, his first visit to England. Wilson met him with a car at Farnborough Station, took him to see a small field exercise on the Aldershot training areas, then round the barracks, back to the Staff College, and to tea with Lord Roberts. "The chief and Foch made great friends, neither understanding a word each other said." Each of these two men, dynamic if small, responded to the other's force of character.

Probably also, Foch's appreciation was enhanced because at this time Roberts was on the full tide of his campaign for compulsory service, which alone would provide the scale of Army that Foch desired to see alongside the French.

Next day Wilson met Foch at Andover, whence they made a tour of the camps on Salisbury Plain, and on the following morning Wilson drove to London to escort Foch to the War Office. After lunch they visited the museum and library of the Royal United Service Institution. Sir Arthur Leatham, then secretary, has told the story how, his door suddenly thrown open, Wilson walked in and enthusiastically said, "I've got a French general outside, General Foch, boss of their Staff College, whom I want to introduce you to. And mark my words, Leatham, this fellow's going to command the Allied Armies when the big war comes on." The remark is notable not merely as prophecy, but as indicating Wilson's view of Franco-British strategic relationship in the future alliance. The Royal United Service Institution is housed in the Banqueting Hall of the old Whitehall Palace, and from it Charles I had walked out on to the scaffold where his head would be cut off. The cynical may perhaps see a symbolism in the fact of Wilson's walking out from the same building—with Foch.

It is significant also that in July Wilson was visited by Lord Kitchener, just returned from India, who, in Wilson's words, "attacked me about trying to form a 'school of thought.'"

Kitchener seemingly feared the evolution of a doctrine into a dogma, to the excommunication of free thought.

In August Wilson left Camberley for the War Office to take up the key post of Director of Military Operations. He at once left for France, where he intended to accompany Foch on a staff exercise. But it was interrupted by a summons to Foch, who had been chosen to attend the manœuvres of the Russian Army. However, in October Wilson again travelled to Paris, to attend the wedding of Foch's daughter. To those who know the domestic reserve of the French, especially the French officer, this invitation reveals the rapid growth of intimacy between the two men.

On the morning after, they turned to business. Wilson's diary records of Foch : " He tells me that the Russian Army is getting on, but very slowly ; . . . he says that he doesn't think Russia would actively interfere if Germany and France were to fight about Belgium, but Russia would do all her possible if war broke out through the Balkans, . . . he believes Germany will absorb Belgium peacefully and throw the onus of war on France, and, in short, Foch is of opinion that, in the coming war in Belgium, France must trust to England and not to Russia, and that all our plans must be worked out in minutest detail so that we may be quite clear of the action and the line to take."

The last clause deserves emphasis. If some of the members of the British Cabinet had seen Wilson's diary they might have had a shock.

For the next link in the chain, the chain that made the Entente a bond, we must turn to the evidence of Huguet, the French Military Attaché in London. In January, 1906, Mr. Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, had given permission for the Director of Military Operations, Grierson, to discuss with Huguet the problem of possible military co-operation. But when, in July, Grierson was succeeded by Ewart, an extremely cautious and reticent officer, the conversations flagged. During his four years of office Ewart did not once discuss the subject with Huguet, and such fitful study as continued was left to his subordinates. Further, there was a change of opinion as to the site of British

action. While the French wished the British Expeditionary Force to join up with their armies in France, the British General Staff was in favour of sending it to Belgium where it could operate against the Germans' flank. Because of this difference of views, and a general indifference in high places, the minutes of the negotiations were more contradictory than conclusive.

When Wilson came to the War Office in 1910, he found only shadowy arrangements for co-operation on paper. And nothing beyond paper. Since 1904 the internal reconstruction of the Army had absorbed attention. No actual measures had been taken, nor time-table made, for the transport of the Expeditionary Force across the Channel. Huguet took an early opportunity to complain to Wilson of the inadequate steps taken to put this important question on a proper basis. Wilson's response was gratifying: "Important question! It is vital. There is no other!"

The answer is a tribute to Wilson's energy, and contained a promise that was soon fulfilled by steps to bring the mobilisation time-table into accord with the French time and scheme of concentration, to hasten the progress of mobilisation in consequence, and to fix the train and port arrangements.

But the answer is also witness to Wilson's narrowness of view. And through this narrowness, which shut out the historic broad horizon of British war policy, he made the war effort of Britain an appendix to the war plan of France. The ties might be of silk, but silk is inelastic. And, although each strand might seem fragile, by multiplying them he gave them an unbreakable strength.

Hitherto, British preparations had been devoted to the re-organisation of the Army, and the correction of the faults revealed in South Africa, leaving the movement and destination of the troops to be arranged when an emergency came. If this policy was opportunistic, perhaps also short-sighted, and entailed a characteristic delay in exerting Britain's force, it allowed the use of judgment in the use of that force.

In contrast, the very completeness of the preparations sponsored by Henry Wilson decreed the manner and direction in

which the power of Britain should be used. That decree was made absolute by the omission of any alternative arrangements.

The absence of an alternative is contrary not merely to the profoundest lesson of war but to the very nature of war. It sins against the light which Bourcet shed by his most penetrating dictum that "every plan of campaign ought to have several branches and to have been so well thought out that one or other of the said branches cannot fail of success." This was the light that his military heir, Napoleon, followed in seeking always, as he said, to "*faire son thème en deux facons*." In any problem where an opposing force exists, and cannot be regulated, one must foresee and provide for alternative courses. Adaptability is the law which governs survival in war as in life, war being but a concentrated form of the human struggle against environment.

Militarily, Henry Wilson's arrangements committed the British Expeditionary Force to the rôle of left wing of the French armies, and thereby "landed" Britain on the Continent, ensuring that she would have to break with tradition, conscript the manhood of the nation into the Army, and place the weight of that national Army in France.

Politically, the greatest effect of his arrangements was to occur even earlier. For in the first days of August, 1914, their suddenly realised completeness, enhanced by fixity, formed a bond which the Cabinet felt helpless to loosen without treason to France. It was a rope round the neck of British policy. The Cabinet might still hesitate, but at any motion to draw back the restraint of the collar made itself felt. It could only be eased by going forward. Hence the abrupt change from reluctance to acquiescence when the German invasion of Belgium provided a justifiable chance to go forward—to war.

Well might Foch, soon after first acquaintance, come to address Wilson as "Henri."

How far Wilson foresaw the full consequence of his newly cemented ties is uncertain. That if he had foreseen them he would have desired to forego them is unlikely. But the peculiarly one-sided blindness with which he made the contract is shown by numerous sidelights. It is as late as September, 1911, when this

entry appears in his diary : " Huguet came to see me. . . . He told me where the French General Staff wants us to go, and what their plans are. This is the first time I have been told." There is unconscious irony in the sentence that follows : " He told me also that if I had gone to the manœuvres, M. Messimy was himself going to have invested me with the collar of the Legion of Honour." " Collar " seems a peculiarly apt, if not exact, rendering of *cravate*.

Wilson's attachment to the cause of France and *La Revanche* grew so strong under the stimulus of Foch that it came to resemble the blindly passionate devotion of a romantic lover. On his next visit to the 1870 battlefields round Metz he performed a self-dedicatory act which he records thus : " We paid my usual visit to the statue of ' France,' looking as beautiful as ever, so I laid at her feet a small bit of map I have been carrying, showing the areas of concentration of the British Forces on her territory."

He went back to England to throw himself with renewed zest and zeal into his self-appointed task of persuading the Government " of the necessity of an alliance with France," and also if possible of the need for conscription—in order to make this alliance militarily adequate to French desires. In pursuing his mission, spurred on by hearing that " Foch is sure of war in the spring " (of 1912), he sought to inveigle and not merely to persuade the Cabinet into a course which " the wasters," as he called them, feared as likely to compromise their independence and peace policy. If he failed to obtain an actual pledge, he pledged them morally to an extent which they only realised in the critical days of late July, 1914.

Wilson's visits to France multiplied, and he lost no opportunity for receiving fresh injections of Fochian serum. For this purpose, he had now to travel further afield than Paris. For in 1911, Foch, on promotion to general of division, had left the Ecole de Guerre to take up the command of the 13th Infantry Division. Curiously his headquarters were in the barracks at Chaumont, which six years later were to be occupied by the General Headquarters of the American Expeditionary Force. This post was but a stepping-stone to a higher one, for in October

of the following year he received command of the VIII Army Corps at Bourges. Thither Wilson went in February, 1913, and the discussion that he records is a curious reflection on history and on military wisdom.

He had first been to Paris to meet General Joffre, now the Commander-in-Chief designate of the French Army for war, and his abler coadjutor Castelnau. "My talk with Castelnau and Joffre was about Repington's recent articles in *The Times*, where he claims that our Navy is worth 500,000 bayonets to the French at the decisive point. I had written to Fred Oliver that our Navy was not worth 500 bayonets. Castelnau and Joffre did not value it at one bayonet! Except from the moral point." Then Wilson went on to Bourges, where, he found, "Foch is exactly of the same opinion. . . ."

In the light of history, of all history, not merely that of 1914-18, this view seems unbelievably limited. How could men professing to be strategists don such narrowly military blinkers? It is deplorable that the holder of the post in the War Office most directly concerned with strategic problems should have ignored the influence of sea-power and the part played by economic and political factors in the history of his country's wars. But it is even more symptomatic of military culture that the members of a General Staff which had spent forty years in unprecedentedly intensive research to discover the historical recipe for victory should have been so ignorant of the wider experiences of war. Had they focussed their eyes so hard on Napoleon that, like a man who gazes at a bright light, they became blinded? Perhaps another simile defines the effect even more exactly. It is that by prolonged concentration of the vision on one spot, Napoleon, they had hypnotised themselves. And, aside from such wider questions as that of blockade, the military doctrine and plan evolved during the prologue to 1914 suggests a state of hypnotic trance as the only credible explanation.

The climax of the prologue was the crisis in the French high command, which was in turn a repercussion of the international crisis of 1911. When the otherwise pacific German Foreign Minister, Kiderlen-Wächter, despatched a gunboat to Agadir as

a means of "encouraging" France to grant concessions in Africa, he certainly did not realise how far the ripples, caused by this pebble that he dropped into the pool of European politics, would spread. The act not merely brought war closer than many more flagrant provocations, but when the turmoil subsided it left an ineffaceable sense of the inevitability of war. In Germany diplomacy was weakened and public opinion rallied to support a further increase in the German Navy. Abroad it consolidated the Entente between France and Britain, and gave to this tenuous link a tenacious strength that made its future severance difficult.

In France the danger so aroused the Government that, in recoil from it, the military were given a license of which they had long been deprived for fear of a *coup d'état*. They used it to achieve a *coup d'état* within the Army. And, ironically, the result was to smooth the way for the German armies in 1914. So that "Agadir" served its instigators in a better way than they could ever have conceived!

The military revolt, none the less destructive because it was waged with tongues instead of arms, found its leader and prophet in Lieut.-Colonel de Grandmaison—Foch's prize pupil. Now risen to be head of the Operations branch of the General Staff, he was thus Henry Wilson's opposite number. These two men were each to dig a pitfall for their own country.

In the existing plan of campaign to meet a German invasion, the French armies were distributed in depth—forming a T-shaped strategic pattern—so that they could be manœuvred against the enemy according to the line of invasion that he followed. The strategy was thus of a defensive-offensive nature—to let the enemy show his hand and then, through the elasticity of the French formation, to throw a powerful "mass of manœuvre" against him. While the strategy was initially defensive the tactics were not. The intention was not so much to break the enemy's impetus by a stubborn defence, preparatory to a counterstroke, as to shake him with a frontal blow at one point and then to overthrow him with a heavier blow on his flank. The plan, which certainly ensured elasticity, trusted to superior movement

for its success rather than to a combination of ground—prepared for defence—and movement.

But to Grandmaison this plan, even, was contrary to the French spirit and constituted “an almost complete atrophy of the idea of the offensive.” Grandmaison argued that, instead of waiting for the enemy to disclose his move, he should be attacked. “An adversary assailed sharply and at all points simultaneously thinks of warding off the blows; he is immobilised and becomes rapidly incapable of any serious offensive. It is the quickness with which we engage the enemy that guarantees us against surprise, and the force of the attack which secures us against the enemy’s manœuvres.” He epitomised his theory by saying: “We must not recoil before this principle, of which only the form seems paradoxical: in the offensive, imprudence is the best of safeguards.” The conclusion was that, whatever the rôle of a force, there was only one mode of action, attack—which in application meant a headlong assault.

This theory, which really rested on the sentimental assumption that Frenchmen were braver than Germans, certainly simplified the rôle of the leader. For directly an enemy was sighted he had merely to give the order “Forward!” General Boucher has related that, when the doctrine gained sway over the peace exercises of the Army, any officer who did not thus charge with lowered head, was deemed to be lacking in “nerve.” The strategy of the bull had replaced that of the matador.

The simplicity of the theory combined with its appeal to the French temperament—and its implicit tribute to the irresistible spirit of Frenchmen—to capture the imagination of the Army. In the young who would have to stake their own lives criticism of the folly may be tempered by admiration of its superb audacity. But in commanders and staff officers responsible for others’ lives it was wholly culpable. On behalf of the generals the excuse may be pleaded that they were afraid of the charge that their nerve was failing through age increasing. It is harder for an officer to accept a certain sacrifice of his own career than a potential sacrifice of men’s lives.

Grandmaison actually raised his standard of revolt in the hall

where he gave two successive lectures before an audience that embraced most of the higher commanders and the General Staff. And he had taken care to win them over to his ideas beforehand by sedulous propaganda. Only one man of authority stood out against the flowing tide. This was General Michel, who, as Vice-President of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, was the Commander-in-Chief designate in case of war. But under the existing system, imposed by Parliament to curtail the former power of the Army, his prospective office did not give him power to control the General Staff and its doctrine. As Michel was in a minority of one, the "Young Turks" carried the issue. For, dominating the General Staff, they were firmly entrenched in the Ministry of War, where the political chief, the President of the Council, was a bird of passage, and the Vice-President an outsider.

Michel was the real target of the "Young Turks." He had precipitated the crisis by bringing forward a fresh plan of campaign. This was designed to meet a double hypothesis—that the Germans would violate Belgian neutrality, and march not only east of the Meuse, but west of it through the Belgian plain; that they would seek to develop an overwhelming superiority by using both active and reserve corps in the attack. To meet this double danger, Michel proposed to stand on the defensive along the east or Lorraine frontier, and to place the bulk of his forces facing the north or Belgian frontier. As this meant doubling the length of his front, he further proposed to double up reserve with active regiments in the first line.

The suggested intermixture horrified most of the professional officers. Even the existing plan was based on a mobility and manœuvring power of which, they said, only well trained troops were capable. There was much sense in their contention.

The intermixture foreseen by Michel was carried so far down the scale that the general brake on mobility might offset the increase of quantity. But reservists endowed, as they would be, with modern weapons certainly have great stopping power in defence. Thus they could form a shield for the swordsman, a stout covering behind and beyond which the active troops could manœuvre. If the Germans dared to use reserve divisions for the

original attack, how much more safely might the French risk using them in parrying it.

But Michel's proposal had no chance of amendment. It was given no hearing. And Michel, thrown down by all his colleagues on the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, was compelled to resign by the new Minister of War, Messimy.

Who should succeed him? The "Young Turks" only desire was that it should be someone complacent, for they felt competent to manage the Army—on a limited company basis. Galliéni, the famous pacifier of Madagascar, might have had the succession. But he had indicted Michel, owing largely to his distrust of reserve troops, and he was too scrupulous to draw personal profit from the result. Messimy then asked him for alternative names. He suggested, first, Pau, an intellectually qualified soldier, and then Joffre, who had built fortifications for him in Madagascar, and was now intended to take charge of the lines of communications if war came.

Pau was offered the post, but when he demanded increased powers the Government remembered his clerical opinions and suspected him of dictatorial ambitions. So Joffre was chosen, and the War Minister, addressing an audience of journalists, declared: "With General Joffre . . . I shall strive to develop the doctrine of the offensive with which our Army is beginning to be impregnated."

Joffre was known to be a good republican and devoid of political attachments. Heavy in body and intellect, he was obviously no Cassius. Thus the Government did not fear to alter the system and give him the dual functions of Vice-President of the Council and Chief of the General Staff. The combination endowed him with control in peace and command in war. And another combination promptly took charge of the endowment. Joffre's slow wits, combined with his inexperience of advanced war studies, made him a modern Delphic oracle, the mouthpiece of a military priesthood among whom Grandmaison was the actual augur and General de Castelnau the officiating high priest. For, with amusing illogicality, Joffre's ignorance of strategy had been officially recognised by the nomination of Castelnau as his

assistant and Chief-of-Staff in the event of war. The Government was too distrustful of Castelnau's clerical sympathies to give him control of the Army, yet trusted him with control of the Commander-in-Chief.

The oracle lost no time in announcing the new code. "The French Army, returning to its traditions, no longer knows any other law than the offensive. . . . All attacks are to be pushed to the extreme with the firm resolution to charge the enemy with the bayonets, in order to destroy him. . . . This result can only be obtained at the price of bloody sacrifices. Any other conception ought to be rejected as contrary to the very nature of war."

This contrasts significantly with the note which Napoleon had struck during the wonderful campaign of 1805 which culminated at Austerlitz: "All my care will be to gain victory with the least possible shedding of blood; my soldiers are my children." How different, as an inspiration to commanders and men, from the words of the new oracle! And all the more curious because this oracle claimed and believed itself to be the reincarnation of Napoleon, in direct apostolic succession.

How can we explain the mutilation? Perhaps best by repeating the words of Foch: "As for my book, it is a work of faith rather than of science." Faith selects the evidence that suits it, where science weighs all. There is no quotation, no hint even, in Foch's books of Napoleon's 1805 declaration. But neither is there any consideration of the Ulm campaign, Napoleon's most bloodless triumph of strategy, nor of Austerlitz, Napoleon's most illustrious victory in battle. Austerlitz was an example of the defensive-offensive, resistance followed by a riposte. It did not fit into the theory that "in strategy as in tactics, one attacks."

After recasting the official doctrine in an imitation that was a travesty of Napoleon's, the next step of Grandmaison and his school was to make ready the human sacrifice. To this end they went back beyond Napoleon to the Frederician model in training the troops, and aimed at a discipline of the muscles, not of the intelligence, sacrificing initiative in order, by an incessant repetition, "to develop in the soldier the reflexes of obedience." The

new tactical regulations were really framed for a battlefield of bayonets, not of bullets.

The dream structure was completed by a new plan, the now notorious Plan XVII, which visualised an early general offensive in which all the available active forces were to hurl themselves on the German armies, striking immediately successive right and left hand blows. These, it was apparently presumed, would inevitably smash the enemy, whatever his strength. For the plan looked no further ahead. As a masterpiece of strategy it had certainly a delightful simplicity, if it did not require the simplicity of genius to devise it. It is a proverb of fashion that simplicity is costly, but, without taking account of the ultimate cost of execution, one may feel that even for the conception an expensive body of designers on a life contract was unnecessary. It was the sort of plan that the humblest *poilu* would have provided in return for a pint of *vin ordinaire*.

* * * * *

While the seeds which Foch had sown at the Ecole de Guerre were producing these green shoots, he himself was ploughing fresh furrows as a commander of troops. For once, a theorist received prompt and full recompense. He had only been at Bourges a year when, in September, 1913, he was transferred to the command of the XX Army Corps, the most prized of the army corps commands because it formed the spearhead of the French Army. One of its divisions, the 11th, was known as the "iron division"; the other claimed that it would prove the "steel division."

Thus Foch came to the Nancy command. Whether or not he remembered Millet's warning, his appointment certainly revived an earlier memory. He ordered for the day of his entry—August 23, 1913—a grand musical "retreat" in which the massed bands of the garrison took part. With a torrent of sound he drowned the discordant fanfares of Manteuffel. In the words of his ardent biographer, Louis Madelin, "a small revenge compared with what he meditated and was about to consummate." Yet, in his own mind hope burned low, even though desire never

flagged. "I had been expecting war for the last forty years, but I was beginning to think that I should end my days without having seen it."

Like his predecessors in the command, Foch's physical presence at Nancy, directly facing the German frontier, tended to the concentration of his mind on that potential battlefield. But with him this came as a practical corrective to a mystical habit of mind. And one of its firstfruits was his appreciation of the importance of the Grand-Couronné, the name given to the chain of heights which forms a natural rampart across the approaches to Nancy. It had been left unfortified because it was deemed to project dangerously in front of the line of frontier fortresses that ran from Verdun through Toul and Epinal to Belfort.

General Cherfils has related that its hurried organisation for defence, of momentous effect, was due to the efforts of Foch. "He had the defences constructed with the means at his disposal without waiting for an allotment from the military budget." Exactly one year after the "retreat" that triumphantly hailed Foch's entry into Nancy, that musical memory was itself drowned in the echoes of a grimmer kind of retreat, a recoil upon Nancy of the force that had dashed to the headlong assault of the German positions. In that unforeseen calamity, the defences of the Grand Couronné were a means of salvation. How strange that Foch, the peace-time prophet of the offensive, should have retrieved its ill-consequences by his attention to means of defence during his last lap in command before the war came. Characteristically, his efforts were inspired by an offensive purpose—that of providing a secure spring-board for his jump forward when Plan XVII was put into operation.

In fairness, it should be added that, as he had no share in making the offensive plan of campaign, so also his doctrine of the offensive had been pressed to an extreme by his former disciples who now governed the military mind of France. The teaching of Foch, indeed, was *démodé* on the eve of the war. To Grandmaison and his staff associates, Foch's emphasis on *sûreté*, and inference that temporary defence might play a part in it, seemed a want of faith in the irresistible élan of the French soldier.

To this loosening of influence over the rising generation of staff officers his own manner contributed. His treatment of war had tended to become more mystical as he became more senior, and he was fond of speaking in parables which were difficult to fathom. Once, at a conference after an exercise, his summing up consisted of one vehement sentence hurled at a commander: "If you arrive at the station two or three minutes after the train has gone, you miss it!" He rarely stooped to explain or elaborate, and allowed no deviation from his own views. Among the more senior officers he neither sought nor commonly attained popularity, while to the junior and the men he was simply a symbol. Even if he was aware that some of his mystified subordinates declared him to be insane, he did not care, for he was more concerned to generate "will" than to foster understanding. To him *morale* was the offspring of his own soul, and, sure of that, he was content.

As a symbol, he was revered, at least among the instinctively hero-worshipping younger officers, if not always by the more sophisticated members of the General Staff. One of the former, Captain Dubarle, has left an interesting record of his impression of Foch when attached to the "iron division" for exercises early in July, 1914. "What strikes one first is his bright, penetrating glance, full of intelligence, but, in spite of that great energy, still luminous. This light in his eye spiritualises a face that otherwise would be almost brutal, with its heavy moustache and protruding jaw. When he speaks, drawing lessons from the exercises, he becomes extraordinarily animated, almost passionate . . . he points out the principles of warfare, castigates faults, makes an appeal to one's best energies, all in the same brief and contained style. He is a priest who judges, condemns, and teaches in the name of a dogma that inspires him, and to which he has devoted all the strength of his *mind* and heart. General Foch is a prophet inspired by his God."

Foch through a magnifying-glass! The very exaggeration of youth's admiring lens brings out the essential features of the portrait more prominently for the analytical eye.

Dubarle's letter, to his parents, was written on July 5th, 1914. That same day the Kaiser gave a blank cheque to the Austrian

envoy, the promise that Austria "could depend on the complete support of Germany." "In the Kaiser's opinion there must be no delay. . . . If it was to come to a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia she could be assured that Germany would stand at her side."

On July 19th the Austro-Hungarian Council of Ministers approved Berchtold's draft ultimatum to Serbia. That morning a familiar figure in unfamiliar civilian clothes emerged from the station at Morlaix, and stepped out briskly on the road to Ploujean. Charles Le Goffic, one of those who after the war cast himself for the rôle of Boswell to Foch's Johnson, supplies the appropriate comment of the station lounge: "Hullo! General Foch is home again. . . . That's all right! The war isn't coming this time."

Foch had come back on leave to Treufeunteuniou for the last time in the world as it was. Thither also his two sons-in-law, Captain Fournier of the General Staff and Captain Bécourt of the 26th Chasseurs à Pied, had come to join him with their wives and children. The fact that he had only taken a fortnight's leave may perhaps suggest that he was less assured of peace than Le Goffic's observant lounge.

On July 26th a telegram was brought out to his country retreat, summoning him urgently back to Nancy. For forty years he had dreamed of this moment. All that time he had concentrated his mind on the *Revanche* to which, like the youthful Hannibal, he had dedicated himself. Unlike Hannibal, he was sixty-two when the chance of self-fulfilment came.

Chapter VII

THE LAUNCHING OF THE WAR

AT eleven o'clock in the morning of July 28th Austria's declaration of war was delivered in Belgrade. Strange coincidence that the World War was to begin, as it was to end, at the eleventh hour—the hour that is symbolic of urgent action. And from that hour the spirit of urgency reigned supreme, to the abdication of reasoned, forethoughtful judgment. The ruling impulse of the General Staffs was to start their war-machines lest they be left behind by rival drivers. The statesmen were assigned and too easily accepted a back place, urged to this seat by the plea of military necessity. Already in Austria, Conrad von Hötzendorf, Chief of the General Staff, enjoyed the sombre distinction of having been the prime instigator of war against Serbia.

Now, at the news of Austria's declaration, Russia's General Staff develop a pressure too strong for Sazonov to resist. They assert that their machine is fitted only for general, not for partial, mobilisation, and the statesman is helpless to controvert such "technical reasons." The *ukase* is placarded on the morning of July 31st. A few hours later the Austrian order for general mobilisation is given. The day before, the Austrians had received from Moltke, the Chief of the German General Staff, the message: "Decline the renewed advances of Great Britain in the interests of peace. A European War is the last chance of saving Austria-Hungary. Germany is ready to back Austria unreservedly." This stimulating message had been followed by a telegram direct to Conrad: "Mobilise at once against Russia. Germany will mobilise." In this way Moltke counteracted the temporising telegrams of his own statesman, Bethmann-Hollweg.

In Berlin a "state of danger of war," the veiled first step of mobilisation, was proclaimed on July 31st, and ultimatums were dispatched not only to St. Petersburg but to Paris. The ultimatum to Russia, demanding instant suspension of all military measures, was followed by a formal declaration of war as soon as the twelve hours' grace elapsed. The ultimatum to France demanded to know whether she would remain neutral "in a Russo-German War," and added the menace "Mobilisation will inevitably mean war." When the German Ambassador called for his answer next day, he received the curtly dignified reply that "France would act as her interests required." Before nightfall the order for mobilisation was issued both in France and in Germany.

But in France the Government could still override "military necessity." On July 30th an unwilling General Staff had been ordered to withdraw the frontier forces to a line ten kilometres inside the frontier. The commanders on the frontier, however, exercised their discretion in minimising the military risk of such a withdrawal. In some cases they reduced the ten kilometres to four. And on mobilisation Joffre's strong protest induced the Government to rescind the order.

German patrols had, indeed, infringed the frontier as early as the 30th and again on the 31st. But the German declaration of war was delayed until August 3rd, through a far-fetched assumption, fostered by the Ambassador in London, that if Germany refrained from attack on France, England would remain neutral and guarantee the passivity of France while Russia was being crushed. The delusion at least produced a significant illustration of the incapacity of the military chiefs to regulate the machine they had created. The Kaiser exclaimed to Moltke—"We march, then, with all our forces, only towards the East." Moltke replied "that this was impossible. The advance of armies formed of millions of men . . . was the result of years of painstaking work. Once planned, it could not possibly be changed." The Kaiser bitterly retorted: "Your uncle would have given me a different answer." He gave way to Moltke's insistence on continuing the concentration against France, but placed a twenty-four-hour brake on the actual crossing of the frontier. Even this

so shook the bulky frame of Moltke that he pathetically recorded "It was a great shock to me, as though something had struck at my heart." However, the strain was relieved by the convenient gap that commonly occurs between the issue of orders and their execution: that day some of his advanced troops had entered neutral Luxembourg, actually in advance of time-table.

Next day, August 2nd, German troops occupied Luxembourg in force and in the evening the long prepared ultimatum to Belgium was delivered, demanding the free passage required by the war plan that was still longer prepared—since 1905. While the threat hardened Belgium to resist the violation of her neutrality, it put an end to the indecisions of the British Cabinet, torn between desire for peace and the ties of the Entente with France. An ultimatum that Germany should respect Belgian neutrality was delivered. German strategy had rescued British policy from an uncertainty—of certain damage. At the eleventh hour of the evening of August 4th England's ultimatum expired, in Berlin. German troops had already begun the invasion of Belgium.

They were uncorking the long-matured Schlieffen Plan, which was to be christened, with bitter irony, "Schlieffen-and-water" when the consequences of Moltke's modifications were seen. He himself, as swollen in frame as his famous uncle had been spare, might aptly be termed "Moltke-and-sawdust."

The elder Moltke, a shrewd realist, had not been carried away by the apparent ease of his triumph in 1870. He had gauged the fundamental lessons better than his French critics. He had so well calculated the growth of material obstacles, due to the improvement of weapons and the development of the French fortifications, that he regarded a rapid decision as an impracticable ideal. In his plan of 1877, for a two-front war, he had contemplated a heavy blow against France as a first step, with the hope, not of reaching Paris, but of inducing the French to negotiate; and then switching his forces to the East. Two years later he turned his face more definitely to the East as the only practicable direction of attack. He decided to stand on the defensive in the West with four and a half corps while he launched fourteen corps

in an offensive against Warsaw. To this plan he adhered until his retirement in 1888.

His successor, Waldersee, came to the same conclusion—that the new French dispositions and fortifications made an attack too unfavourable to be risked. But Waldersee soon fell from power owing to his tactlessness in allowing the Kaiser to be defeated in the army manœuvres. Thus in 1891 Schlieffen succeeded to the office of Chief of the General Staff, and to the problem. Like his predecessors, he found it insoluble. But he was a fervid devotee of Clausewitz, and pressed to its logical extreme the doctrine that military success cancelled all other factors. He was so convinced that the main enemy army must be not merely defeated but annihilated, that he convinced himself that such a complete result was possible. He applied himself assiduously to the study of military history, but only to find examples to support his thesis. And in taking Cannæ as both his model and his aim, he exaggerated its offensive form.

As he was practical enough to realise that the fortress region on the Lorraine frontier was no suitable arena for such a drama, he sought an alternative course, where offensive manœuvre would have more scope. Thus, unlike his predecessors, he made policy the servant of strategy, and committed Germany to the political risks of a detour through Belgium. In his first plan he sought to curtail them by merely advancing through Belgian Luxembourg, presumably hoping the proverbial excuse for the illegitimate baby, that it was “only a small one,” would cover this violation of neutrality. But, as finally formulated in 1905, the plan was extended, with an extension of its affront and risks, to embrace the heart of Belgium.

The mass of the German forces was to be concentrated on the right or western wing for a gigantic wheel, while the left wing, facing the French frontier, was designedly reduced to the slenderest possible size. The right wing would pivot on the fortified area Metz-Thionville, and, traversing a vast arc through Belgium and Northern France, would wheel gradually east, to press the French back towards the Moselle, where they would be hammered on the anvil formed by the Lorraine fortresses and the

Swiss frontier. In this wheel the extreme right wing would pass west of Paris and cross the Seine near Rouen.

The swinging mass would comprise fifty-three divisions, while to the secondary army on the left wing were allotted only eight divisions. Its very weakness was of great potential promise in easing the path of the massive right wing. For if the French took the offensive and pressed the German left wing back towards the Rhine, the further they pressed on the more difficult would it be for them to parry the thrust through Belgium against their flank and rear. Like a revolving door, if they threw their weight against one leaf, the sooner and more forcefully would the other leaf swing round and strike them in the back.

Here lay the real subtlety of the plan, not merely in the geographical detour. There is a doubt how far Schlieffen conceived this reaction as a deliberate trap, how far the influence of Clausewitz obscured the deduction from Hannibal. For Groener has divulged that "in forming his plan Schlieffen took as basis that the French would stand on the defensive, as then seemed probable." But Schlieffen was certainly willing, like the elder Moltke before him, to take the risk that the French might advance as far as the Rhine.

The French plan of 1914 fitted into Schlieffen's plan with a neatness beyond conception. It was the one thing needed to make the Schlieffen plan perfect. The French, forswearing the advantage of their own fortified barrier, were to rush headlong on the enemy's, thus enabling the Germans to offer resistance on the sector that suited them, while striking in the sector which the French had left exposed.

Unfortunately for Germany, the younger Moltke had modified Schlieffen's idea through lacking the courage of his calculations. While Schlieffen, dying, murmured, "It must come to a fight. Only make the right wing strong," Moltke bolstered up the left wing. Of the nine divisions which became available between 1905 and 1914 he allotted eight to the left wing and only one to the right. And in the critical days of execution he would displace the proportions even more to the detriment of the right wing.

One of the great surprises in store for the French was the German scheme of using Landwehr and Ersatz troops in the initial offensive, a surprise again made more effective by the French disregard of reservists—through discounting their value.

But although Moltke had intended to use his six Ersatz divisions to reinforce his right wing, when the time came he diverted them to the left. In consequence, seven active divisions were dropped from the right wing in its march—to watch Antwerp and to invest Maubeuge and Givet. And on August 25th, after the first encounter with the French near Charleroi, another four divisions were subtracted from the right wing when the Russian invasion of East Prussia looked momentarily menacing. This subtraction was due, however, to self-delusion, not merely lack of moral courage. For the excuse afterwards given was that Moltke and his Staff thought that the decisive victory on the right wing was already won! Too late to be of use in the East where the victory of Tannenberg had annulled the Russian threat, these divisions were too soon in leaving the West.

No want of courage could be imputed to the French plan. Here the fault was due to a belief in the supremacy of mind over matter, which in reality proved the subordination of mind to mirage. Based on the idea of an immediate offensive "with all forces united," Plan XVII ordained an attack by the First (Dubail) and Second (Castelnau) Armies in Lorraine, towards the Saar. These formed Joffre's right fist. His left fist was formed of the Third Army (Ruffey) opposite Metz and the Fifth Army (Lanrezac) facing the Ardennes. Their rôle was either to take the offensive between Metz and the Luxembourg frontier near Thionville, or, if the Germans came through neutral territory, to strike at their inner flank. In that case, the Fourth Army (Langle de Cary), held in strategic reserve near the centre, would reinforce the left fist. Two groups of reserve divisions were placed in rear of the two extreme flanks—their rearward position geographically expressed the military opinion upon their capacity.

More far-reaching for ill than these dispositions was the double miscalculation of force and space on which they were

based. Before war came, the French Intelligence at least recognised the possibility that the Germans might use their reserve divisions at the outset, and on this hypothesis estimated that they could deploy in the West a possible 68 divisions. Actually they deployed the equivalent of $83\frac{1}{2}$, counting Landwehr and Ersatz troops. But when war came, and the armies were assembling, the French Intelligence lost sight of the hypothesis, and counted only the active divisions in its estimate of the enemy strength.

As for the miscalculation of space, although Plan XVII recognised the possibility of a German move through Belgium, the wideness of its sweep was absurdly underestimated. The Germans, it was expected, would take the difficult route through the Ardennes—presumably to make it easy for the French to cut their communications. Nor did enlightenment as to their own delusions come quickly to Joffre and his Staff. On August 6th, when the German guns were bombarding the outer defences of Liège, which obstructed their path to the central plain of Belgium, Joffre complaisantly informed the French Armies: "It may be concluded that the Germans are executing a plan of concentration, drawn up two years ago, of which we have knowledge." The reference was to a document found, according to the General Staff story, by a French officer in the lavatory of his railway carriage when travelling in Germany the year before! Thus in blind ignorance and supreme disdain for the enemy's moves, the French offensive was launched.

Chapter VIII

THE BLIND COLLISION

VITRY-LE-FRANÇOIS, a dusty little town on the banks of the Marne, had been awakened from its habitual slumbers to find itself the hub of France. A hundred years ago its hibernating peace had been violently broken by the inroad of Blücher's Prussians, and as abruptly retrieved by one of the last dazzling strokes of Napoleon in his vain struggle to avert inevitable abdication.

Now, in the blazing heat of early August, 1914, Vitry-le-François is again invaded. But not by Prussians. They are still assembling on the frontier. Meantime the school building on the main *Place* has become the skull which houses the brain of the French Armies. Desks that were made for children are occupied by heavily moustached officers of the Staff, who work through the day and night in eight-hour shifts. The atmosphere of its large hall has a portentous silence that would seem to its former inmates as strange a contrast. At one end hangs a map that far outspans those used in their own past geography lessons. On it, twice daily, are marked movements that may vitally alter their next geography lessons. To it, officers tiptoe and in whispers discuss the deductions. By it, Colonel Dupont, head of the Intelligence Section, frequently stands to give his views of what the Germans are doing and where they are going.

One step higher on the hierarchic ladder rests General Berthelot, the Assistant Chief of Staff. We speak metaphorically, for a stout ladder would be needed to support the weight of his seventeen stone. But the weight he carries in the counsels of the *Grand-Quartier-Général* is proportionate. And his ponderous bulk is relieved by quick-darting eyes that catch the attention like helio-

flashes far up a mountain-side. He is to the French Army what Henry Wilson is to the British, the chief adviser, if not in name the Chief of Staff. Some might term him, likewise, its evil genius. But his capacity for misjudgment will be long obscured by his popularity and industry. Seemingly, he lives on his fat, for he survives unshaken a strain and a burden under which the Chief of Staff, General Belin, comes gradually to that collapse which overtook more swiftly the British Chief of Staff, Archibald Murray.

At the top of all rests another monument of human bulk, Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief. "Rests" is in his case a more apt term. His temperament preserves him from the strain of worry. His staff preserves him from the strain of work. During his long sojourn at Chantilly later, an amused observer will note that his office table is unencumbered by papers, his walls bare of maps—save when, on the visit of a photographer, they are hastily brought to festoon the walls and provide a background appropriate to the popular conception of a great commander. He is not, like Napoleon, constantly closeted with a *Bacler d'Albe*.

At Vitry-le-François he may often be seen by the awed onlooker outside the headquarters, walking ponderously to and fro. His clothes are as baggy as his form is bulky. Even the colour contrast of black tunic and red breeches, which, if suggestive of an out-of-date outlook, lends French uniform an artistic charm, cannot lend distinction to this wearer. White hair, pale blue eyes, toneless voice, lack of gesture—all tend to efface his impression. They seem to coincide with that very featurelessness which brought him so surprisingly to power as the proverbially "safe man." But the strong projecting chin carries the stamp of determination, if also of obstinacy. That chin gives form to his bulk, so that it acquires the impressiveness of solidity. Silence naturally strengthens it.

These will prove inestimable assets in a world where the myth of the "strong, silent man" is not yet exploded. Indisposed to believe that a man in so great a position can be as simple as he appears, that his superhuman calm can come from

insensibility, his silence from ignorance, even the Allied leaders who meet him at close quarters will feel that there must be unplumbed depths in the apparent shallows. Still greater will be his temporary value among his own people. When hope comes crashing down and nerves are frayed to tatters, he will seem a rock. And thus because, in a time of emergency, impressions are more influential than reality, Joffre's stolidity and obstinacy will repair the consequences of his gravest blunders. Those who look to him will even be able, giving the lie to their own eyes, to assume as a genius a man who was merely, but truly, a national nerve sedative.

In the first weeks of August, one of the worries that disturb Joffre's tranquillity is the importunity of Lanrezac, commanding the Fifth Army on the left wing. On July 31st, before Lanrezac even left Paris, he had sent in a memorandum which suggested that the German right wing might come, not through the Ardennes towards Sedan, but much further to the north-west. And he has been arguing ever since, much to Joffre's distaste. Lanrezac's manner is not conciliating. Heavy of build like Joffre, he is apt to be as violent and caustic as the other is stolid and restrained, while the way he cranes his head forward, and a habit of hanging his eyeglasses over his ear, accentuate his irritatingly pedagogic air. Since August 9th his anxiety about his exposed western flank has been growing, and has been expressed in his communications to Joffre, although the military habit of concurring with the views of a superior rather than incur his displeasure has checked the full disclosure of his apprehensions. But on August 9th he had objected to making an advance unless the Fourth Army simultaneously took the offensive, and on the 11th his persistency induces Joffre to allow him to side-step further west. On the 14th he goes to see Joffre, and protests that if he strikes north-east as Joffre wishes, his army may be gravely imperilled. For if the German right wing is coming west of the Meuse, it will be sweeping down on to his communications while he is entangled in the Ardennes. Although he appears to be reassured by Joffre's confidence that there is no such menace, he finds fresh information on his return which

redoubles his fears. He will renew his warnings and plead for a further side-step so forcibly that Joffre, although rather scornfully declaring the "danger is far removed," will tardily allow him to move his army into the angle formed by the Sambre and the Meuse.

Even so, the German right wing is sweeping wider still. And it is the little British Expeditionary Force, just arriving on Lanrezac's left, that the scythe will menace most.

Meantime the French right fist is striking in Lorraine. Strategically a "mutton-fist," it will soon be "cold-mutton." On the 14th, the day that Joffre rebukes Lanrezac's anxiety, he uncashes his First and Second Armies. A week earlier their offensive had been preceded by the advance of a detached army corps into Upper Alsace, a move that was partly a military distraction and partly a political attraction. It had reached Mulhouse, aiming at the Rhine bridges below Basel, but had then been forced to withdraw. Now reinforced, and impressively rechristened "The Army of Alsace," it is to renew its advance simultaneously with the main offensive.

In this Dubail's First Army was to strike towards Sarrebourg, with its right flank resting on the Vosges. Once Sarrebourg was reached it would be close to the Saverne Gap that leads to cherished Strasbourg and the Rhine. Castelnau's Second Army, on the left of the First, would advance past Château-Salins—across a country littered with lakes and woods.

Progress is hindered, but by the evening of the 18th the French are in touch with the enemy along the front of both armies. German resistance is deceptively slight, and the far remote G.Q.G. is urging an accelerated advance. The fiery-souled Castelnau, the "*capucin botté*" as he is nicknamed, needs no spur. As full of spirit as he is short of inches, he orders a rapid and vigorous "pursuit." If his far-fetched order cannot do much to quicken the rate of march, it encourages the neglect of precautions.

What of the Germans meantime? When the French advance developed and Moltke realised that they were leaving their fortified line behind, he had a sudden inspiration, or temptation. This was to throw overboard the Schlieffen plan and, instead,

seek a decision in Lorraine. The impulse was short-lived, but long enough for him to divert thither the six newly formed Ersatz divisions that should have gone to the right wing. And when he changed his mind, he failed to change their destination.

Moltke's instructions to his two left-wing Army commanders, the Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria and General von Heeringen, were that they should not only cover his left flank but prevent the French switching troops from opposing his main wheel through Belgium. Rupprecht argued that he could only assure this by attacking. We may suspect that he was loth to forfeit the opportunity of glory by retiring when the German Crown Prince was advancing. But nothing could have been more foolishly vague than Moltke's attitude. He suggested that Rupprecht should lure the French on and catch them in a "sack," but Rupprecht refused to refrain from attacking unless given "definite orders." Moltke's deputy, Stein, then told Rupprecht's Chief of Staff on the telephone: "No, we won't oblige you by forbidding an attack. You must take the responsibility. Make your own decision as your conscience tells you." Conscience seems a curious basis for strategy! And when Rupprecht's Chief of Staff replied: "It is already made. We attack," Stein fatuously exclaimed: "Not really! Then strike and God be with you."

Thus, instead of continuing his withdrawal to the Saar, which had begun on the 14th, Rupprecht halted his army, on the 17th, ready to accept battle. And when he found the French attack slow to develop, he decided to take the offensive himself. He was impelled to this not only by the idea of forestalling the French, but by anxiety to relieve his own uncertainty. For the narrow strip that separated the rival armies was shrouded in an exceptionally dense fog of war. Rupprecht's information was poor and confusing; his cavalry was of little help, and his air reconnaissance was handicapped by the tendency of his infantry to shoot down their own aircraft. Nor did the Supreme Command give him much enlightenment beyond the "news" that Joffre had been superseded by Pau, that two-thirds of the French troops were drunk, and that "no British had yet landed on the Continent"

—when, in fact, they had begun embarkation eight days earlier, and had begun entraining from the Channel ports to the front three days earlier.

For the left-wing offensive, Heeringen's *Seventh Army* was put under the control of Rupprecht as well as his own *Sixth Army*. Rupprecht's plan was that the latter should pin down the French while Heeringen's Army, emerging suddenly from the Saverne Gap and the passes of the Vosges, enveloped their flank. But he was in too much haste, and by failing to give Heeringen's troops time to move into position he helped to thwart the possibility of a success that might have been catastrophic for the French.

They were stumbling blindly into his embrace, their cavalry as useless as the Germans' to provide warning. None of the higher commanders seem to have had a glimpse of the real situation. On the 20th, soon after daybreak, the rival armies would clash on a sixty-mile front, as each was advancing. For the French the shock would be worse because the German assault fell on them as they were staggering from the shock of meeting the defences which the Germans had prepared along the Nied.

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Foch with his XX Corps was on the extreme left of the French advance. The shock of the German onslaught was the climax to a period of strain, under which some commanders of equal age but weaker nerve were already wilting. Foch, however, showed no sign of strain, although it had fallen on him earliest of all. For he had been the sentry over the arms of France. The initial rôle of his army corps had been to watch the enemy while the main French forces were assembling in rear, and to guard this assembly.

Travelling all night from Brittany, he had reached Nancy on the morning of July 27th. Two crowded days of activity and tension followed. Then, on the 29th, he began the construction of trenches to cover Nancy—in continuation of his earlier measure. Next evening his covering troops began to move out into the positions chosen to guard against a German surprise

attack. When, on the 31st, orders came from Paris to "send forward" the covering troops, his two divisions were already in position! Imbued with his own precepts on "security," he had no intention of being caught napping through hesitation or delay.

With equal zeal he disregarded the orders of the Government to observe the ten-kilometre limit. He told his divisional commanders to push their advanced troops beyond it and occupy "Mont d'Amance, Mont St. Jean, and the heights of La Rochette, the real keys to Nancy." Next day, August 1st, he received from the Ministry of War a telegraphic repetition of the orders, but obtained sanction from his immediate military superior to stay where he was. Here he truly foresaw that, if he waited, events would catch him up, instead of making him fall back. One day later they did. He had word that the Government had cancelled the ten-kilometre limit, but still insisted that their troops must avoid crossing the frontier in order that "the entire responsibility for hostilities should be left to the Germans." On receiving this message Foch promptly stretched its concession of his previous step to push reconnaissances a mile beyond his line. There were several skirmishes with German cavalry patrols, even more eager to trespass.

With the declaration of war, all check was removed, and Foch sent air reconnaissances well behind the German frontier, followed on the 6th by detachments of troops. But little was discovered. The enemy seemed quiescent, and showed no signs of early attack. This relief to Foch's natural anxiety was increased by the arrival on the 8th of two more army corps of the assembling Second Army. After ten days of unremitting alertness Foch's men could now have some rest before the general advance began. Their isolated covering rôle was over; they became part of the solid offensive mass of the Second Army.

The solidity, however, was inherently deceptive, being composed, not of concrete, but of human bodies. What a target that mass would offer, what an anachronism it would be on a modern battlefield, with its dense lines of infantry clothed in red trousers and blue *capotes*, led by officers with glistening swords! The

white dust of the scorching roads might serve to complete the symbolical tricolour; it could not cloak that glaringly visible mass from hostile eyes that looked along the sights of deadly fire-weapons. Nor was colour the only handicap. Bullets would be the more difficult to avoid because men were encumbered by the heavy blue tunic-coats that hung below their knees, and converted into beasts of burden by the load of equipment that towered above their shoulders. Fettered in limb, this sweating mass had for its eyes a force of cavalry that suggested a vision of the Court of King Arthur through the eyes of Mark Twain—cuirassiers in resplendent steel breastplates, dragoons in ornamental helmets with horsehair plumes that hung down their backs. Mounted, they were too easily immobilised by modern fire, or brought to a premature halt by needlessly jaded horses; dismounted, they were scarcely more mobile than the chivalry of medieval France at Poitiers.

Courage they had in abundance, both infantry and cavalry, but courage alone could not compensate such manifold material handicaps. Yet this blind, blatant, unwieldy mass was the spear-head that had been forged to deliver the *offensive à outrance*.

In accordance with Plan XVII the Second Army was to be pushed into the angle or pocket formed by the Rivers Saar and Moselle. The further it advanced the more would its flanks be contracted, and also exposed to counter-pressure. The Moselle side of the pocket, moreover, was artificially narrowed by the outspreading fortifications of Metz. And it was along this side that Foch's corps had to advance, guarding the flank of the other corps from counterstroke at the same time as it was pushing forward in unison with them.

When the general advance began on August 14th the awkwardness of its rôle and position was soon felt. It gained the frontier ridge but suffered heavy loss from the German fire, accurately ranged by the use of pre-selected aiming-points. The second day brought a worse trial, for the troops lay still all day under a persistent fire. This enforced passivity was due to the fact that the XV Corps on their right had suffered so badly in the first day's impetuous assault that it needed a day's interval to recover.

When the advance was resumed after daybreak on the 16th, it met a mysterious emptiness. Not a shot was fired. The German positions were found to be untenanted. Local inhabitants told of a night-long retirement.

In an army trained on a more wary tradition, such facts might have engendered suspicion. Not so with the French. Castelnau seems to have jumped to the conclusion that because his men had suffered heavily from the enemy's concealed fire-positions their men, being an inferior race, must have suffered worse, and that they were already wilting before the superiority of French will-power. On the 18th he issued his orders for a rapid pursuit, saying that he expected "corps commanders to inspire in their troops that ardour different from the methodical spirit which is required against prepared positions." The fully prepared German positions, instead of being past, were a day's march ahead.

Castelnau's attitude is the more astonishing because his army was coincidentally reduced. Of his five army corps, two were suddenly taken away to reinforce Joffre's left-fist punch, now that the Germans were known to be coming through Luxembourg and Belgium. As one of these corps, the IX, had hitherto been covering the left flank of the army, its departure not only left to Foch this duty but left his own flank exposed.

On the 19th, however, Foch's divisions pressed forward without trouble until the afternoon, when they came under a fire that steadily grew. He thus fell short of his objectives, but even so had advanced some ten miles. The XV and XVI Corps on his right met more resistance and made less progress. In consequence he was at nightfall standing in echelon ahead of them, instead of behind them, as intended.

That evening Castelnau, still believing that he had only a German rearguard in front of him, issued orders for the attack to be renewed by his XV and XVI Corps next morning. But Foch's corps, because of its advanced position, was to wait, meantime securing its hold on the ground where it stood.

Foch, however, gave orders during the night for his corps to renew the attack at 6 a.m. Three-quarters of an hour before his

attack on Morhange was due to begin he sent a message to Castelnau telling him of the fact. Before it arrived Castelnau had already seen Foch's night orders and had sent a staff officer to tell him not to attack, and that it was most important to entrench strongly as a safeguard against an enemy counterstroke from Metz. And when Foch's 5.15 a.m. message reached Castelnau he sent a stringent order by telephone, forbidding Foch to launch an attack and enjoining strict obedience to his own original orders.

After the war a sharp controversy arose, in which it was asserted that, by rash disobedience, Foch had exposed his left flank to a disastrous counterstroke and so compelled Castelnau to order a general retreat. The historic facts bear out the allegation only in part.

Foch would seem to have had the will to disobey—but the Germans anticipated him. They struck him before his attack could begin. All night long the movement of trains had been heard behind their front. At a quarter past five they attacked Foch's left convergently in front and flank. It was driven back, losing many men and part of its artillery. Fortunately the Germans, though much superior in strength, were tardy in following up their advantage and so allowed Foch's left to re-establish its line.

There are also considerations which affect the question of his will to disobey. His order to attack Morhange was undoubtedly prompted by a desire to help his neighbour, and so showed his interpretation of "intellectual discipline." Moreover, according to his memoirs, neither orders nor information reached him from Army Headquarters on the evening of the 19th, and he did not hear of Castelnau's instructions until morning. The official history is silent on this point.

Whether he took adequate precautions to guard his left is another question. It is significant that Joffre, in telephoning a report of the defeat to the President on August 22nd, said that "the XX Corps . . . advanced perhaps a little too quickly, and before the troops detailed to cover the left flank could get up." Foch's left flank was, obviously, both the most exposed

and the most vital spot of the Second Army line. In the ten-mile gap between it and its starting-point on the River Seille stood only one Reserve division. The Crown Prince Rupprecht was not slow to appreciate where the point of opportunity lay. Against Foch's corner of the line were thrown two army corps, the most heavily weighted odds in the German attack. Foch had ordered a regiment of cavalry, supported by one of infantry, to guard his exposed left flank and to reconnoitre outwards. As his orders were not issued until the early hours of the 20th, the precaution was too late, if also perhaps too slight. And it was so close to nightfall when his previous day's advance had halted that his troops do not appear to have done much to organise their positions for resistance. The German surprise attack at dawn gave them no time to repair this defect, and the Germans began to work round their left rear, producing a critical situation.

Yet the real source of the French retreat was not in Foch's sector. Although less heavily attacked, the left of the XVI Corps had given way as early as seven o'clock, and the whole XV Corps soon fell back even more markedly. Worse still, its troops were reported as being almost at the end of their endurance.

Thus at 10.10 a.m. Castelnau, who had used up his reserves, ordered a general retreat. It is significant that in reporting the fact to Joffre he ascribed the necessity to the attacks on his right. This disproves the charge that Foch's reverse was the cause of the general collapse—for it is the impression received by the supreme commander, rather than the actual situation of the troops, that determines the issue in war.

Castelnau's order for retreat, indeed, came as a distasteful surprise to Foch. His left had rallied, his right was unshaken, and his assailants had outrun the support of their artillery. "If ever I were tempted to disobey, it is today," he told his Chief of Staff, Colonel Duchesne. But the latter reminded him: "You don't know what is happening to the other corps." So, just before noon, Foch directed his divisions to withdraw to the high ground near Château-Salins. He lifted a corner of the veil when he remarked: "But the roads were blocked by troops in disorder,

by supply columns, and by magnificent motor-cars from Nice." Soon a fresh order came from Castelnau, telling him to cover the retreat of the rest of the Army "by holding the Château-Salins bridgehead as long as possible." For the disorder behind Foch's front was good order compared with the state of the other corps. Exhausted and leaderless men poured back in swelling streams, their dejection the worse because they had been so abruptly disillusioned as to the potency of the *offensive à outrance*. The saving factor was that the German pursuit soon slackened.

Foch had made his dispositions to hold the bridgehead, and felt confident of doing so, when he received a message from Castelnau that "the XV Corps, which has suffered very heavily, will not be able to maintain its positions on your right. I consider it advisable, therefore, that you profit by the darkness and fall back tonight." So the retreat continued all night long, and by daybreak the troops were back across their own frontier.

Even there they did not make a stand, although not a German was in sight of them. If Foch's 39th Division had lost most of its guns, his 11th Division was in good fettle. But the other corps were in a parlous state, the XV little better than a mob, and Castelnau decided to retire behind the River Meurthe, leaving only an outpost line on the eastern bank. On his left, the Couronné de Nancy was still held by the Reserve divisions posted there, but the abandonment of this rampart was even contemplated, as Foch found when he visited Army Headquarters in the evening. "I went to Nancy. They wanted to evacuate it. I said: 'The enemy is two days' march distant from Nancy, and the XX Corps is there. They won't walk over the XX without protest!'"

But it looked as if they would walk past it. Next morning the XV Corps reported that its troops were too exhausted to resist any attack. As a temporary relief a brigade from Foch's corps was sent to replace the outposts of the XV Corps, whose retirement across the river it covered. Castelnau's line had now an alarming sag in the centre. Out of this misfortune good fortune came. For into the re-entrant, thus unintentionally formed, the now arriving Germans were throwing their main weight, pushing

towards Lunéville and that very Gap of Charmes which a defensively minded generation of French strategists had earlier prepared for their ensnarement.

Discovering, on the 24th, the Germans' direction, Castelnau decided to profit by the opportunity to strike back at their flanks. Foch was to carry out the left-hand blow.

He struck early on the 25th, and his men at first made progress ; but the enemy made a quick recovery, pressing them back in the afternoon. Nevertheless, Foch's attack had acted as a brake on the German progress along the main line, forcing them to concentrate against his threat to their rear.

The right-hand blow had obtained more visible success. It even led Castelnau in a fresh burst of confidence to call for a pursuit pushed "to the extreme limit of endurance," and "a final blow which will ensure victory." Foch attempted to fulfil this demand next morning, but his men could only make slight progress. As the other corps had also shot their bolt, Castelnau was constrained to call a halt. But if the effort had not realised his offensive ambitions, it had achieved a real defensive object—by paralysing the German advance. This, in the outcome, would not be renewed until over a week later and then, launched frontally against the Couronné de Nancy, would prove a complete disappointment to the Kaiser, waiting with his white cuirassiers to make a triumphal entry into the ancient capital of Lorraine. Foch had helped to prevent a re-echo of the fanfares of Manteuffel.

But he himself was not present to see the foiling of the German aim. For on the night of the 27th he received a summons to a higher rôle. He was at his advanced headquarters at an inn quaintly but aptly called "Les Œufs Durs," when a message was delivered, telling him to report at G.Q.G. to take over a new command. What it would be he did not know. But he was told to take with him two officers as a nucleus for his staff. One of them, Lieut.-Colonel Max Weygand, was then second in command of the 5th Hussars, and actually serving in Foch's corps. He had attended a course at the Centre of Higher Military Studies in 1913, and his selection for this course was a forecast of his future. For he had not been through the Ecole de Guerre ; it was the

exception, and a mark of exceptional promise, for anyone who was not a Staff College graduate to be admitted to the "School for budding marshals."

As an instructor at Saumur, however, the lucid reasoning and striking common sense which underlay his lectures had spread his reputation, and many of his contemporaries had come to regard him as the ablest of their generation. His appointment to be Foch's staff officer was of fateful result for both. Weygand had only met his new chief three times before the war, and then on formal terms. For the first few weeks of their association its endurance was uncertain; Foch was not a man who gave his trust easily, and his ways were disconcerting to a staff officer. But the two soon blended and ultimately became inseparable, mounting the ladder of power together until they became one of the most famous combinations in history.

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The relation of Weygand to Foch has been compared to that of Berthier to Napoleon, and of Ludendorff to Hindenburg. Neither comparison is true. Weygand proved as perfect a staff "clerk" as Berthier; but he was much more—to an amazing memory and a capacity for detail he added strength of character and initiative. Unlike Ludendorff, he did not obscure or superimpose himself on his chief. To the world he sank himself in his chief, and to those who tried to probe beneath the surface replied that all the credit belonged to Foch. His habit of self-effacement was helped by physique. For if Foch was small but sturdy, Weygand was small and slight. Foch was ebullient in speech and gesture, Weygand restrained. And while Foch's head and face, disproportionately large for his body, counterbalanced his lack of inches and made him impressive at first glance, Weygand's small features and dapper air veiled his force of character until closely observed. Then, the impression was the stronger by contrast. Weygand was the natural complement of Foch, supplying the qualities that his Chief lacked. Weygand had the power to translate Foch's cryptic, often fragmentary, phrases into definite and practical instructions. He had a knack of organisation

where Foch was a natural disorganiser. It is a tribute to both that they coalesced into a unity. "Weygand c'est moi." If the phrase is legendary, it is certainly true, and more truly significant, that when confronted with a question he sometimes replied: "Demandez à Weygand, c'est la même chose."

But there was irony in the fact that one who was not a trained staff officer should serve as a staff officer throughout the war. That he fitted his rôle so perfectly, not only in work but in self-effacement, was a jest of fate at the expense of a man who, imbued with the cavalry spirit, longed to command troops.

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Foch and Weygand left by car for G.Q.G. about noon on August 28th. "We crossed Nancy during a squall. Weygand took the opportunity to say good-bye to his wife, who had not yet quitted her home in Lunéville." They next called at Castelnau's headquarters, where they picked up the other new staff officer, Lieut.-Colonel Devaux. More delays came in passing through the entrenched camp of Toul because they had not been given the special countersign. They did not reach Vitry-le-François until dusk. And gloom they found there.

They had left Lorraine with a cheerful feeling as to the situation there and in blissful ignorance as to the situation elsewhere. They were disillusioned abruptly—by the news that all the north of France as far as the Somme was submerged by the German tide of invasion.

From the German attack on Liège Joffre had drawn, not the natural deduction, but the one that suited his plan and his wishes. Although the Germans were obviously taking a path through Belgium, he concluded that the Meuse would be the limit of their detour, and that even so they would have to thin their centre in order to stretch as widely. This assumption fitted the alternative provided for in Plan XVII. Grasping once more at phantoms, Joffre and his staff embraced this idea so fervently that in imagination they saw their left-fist punch delivering a knock-out blow. Their Third and Fourth Armies would strike north-east through the Ardennes against the flank of the Germans advancing through

Belgium and thus dislocate the German enveloping manœuvre. The French Fifth Army, together with the British, would converge against the enemy's other flank. Here was a pretty picture—of the French pincers closing on the unconscious Germans!

The Germans, however, had a similar idea, with rôles reversed and greater strength to realise it. Moreover, they had the additional advantage of moving more widely, without weakness, than the French imagined. Thus the French armies, pushing blindly into the Ardennes, a central sector supposedly denuded of enemy troops, blundered against the German *Fourth and Fifth Armies* on August 22nd and were heavily thrown back.

The troops attacked blindly with the bayonet and were mown down by machine-guns. Fortunately the Germans, also, were so uncertain of the situation that they were slow to follow up their opportunity.

But to the north-west the French Fifth Army and the British had, under Joffre's orders, put their heads almost into the enemy's noose. Lanrezac alone suspected the hidden menace and his precautions helped to avert it. The Allied left wing fell back in time, if only just in time, to escape from the trap.

The repulse of his centre and left wing at last awakened Joffre to the true situation. From the wreckage of his plan he now tried to reconstruct a new plan. He decided to swing back his centre and left, while drawing troops from his right to form a new Sixth Army for a counterstroke on the extreme left. The Germans, by driving his right wing back to the shelter of the French fortress barrier in Lorraine, had helped to make this transfer of force possible.

But on the eve of Foch's arrival at G.Q.G. this new plan had been postponed, if not annulled, by the speed of the German onrush. The German right wing arrived in the Somme area while the Sixth Army was in process of assembling there, and so compelled it to share in the general retreat, now accelerated. Fastest of all to the rear marched the British, for their commander, Sir John French, was so disillusioned with the French plan, so disgusted at the way he seemed to have been first ensnared and then

forsaken, that he was now obsessed with the idea of regaining his base. He even refused to help his neighbour's counter-attack in applying a brake to the German momentum.

When Foch reached Vitry-le-François Joffre had just returned from the headquarters of the Fifth Army, where, after a violent scene, he had compelled Lanrezac to issue orders for this counter-attack, at Guise. Foch heard much about the general situation, but not about his own task. It was, however, a good augury that he was assigned the room which the previous night had been tenanted by the new Minister of War, Millerand.

On the 29th Joffre left early to superintend the riposte at Guise, but before his departure he saw Foch and told him to take command of an "Army Detachment" formed by subtraction from the left wing of General de Langle de Cary's Fourth Army. Foch was to act under Langle de Cary's orders.

The reason for this splitting up lay in the rapidly changing situation. The Fourth Army, originally made the largest for its offensive rôle, had become too unwieldy for handling under the strain of retreat. Moreover, a wide gap had arisen between it and the Fifth Army. Foch's task was to relieve Langle de Cary of part of his burden and, above all, to reknit the line of division between the Fourth and Fifth Armies.

Before taking up his task he had to settle whether Weygand or Devaux should be his Chief of Staff. The former was senior, but the latter was a Staff College graduate. Although G.Q.G. had intended Weygand for the appointment, the choice was submitted to Foch, who replied with characteristic crispness: "I will take the senior. If he is no good to me, back he goes to his regiment in a few days' time." For although he was willing to try Weygand, so highly regarded by G.Q.G., it is clear that he had serious doubts whether an officer lacking the *brevet* of the Ecole de Guerre could prove adequate, and that he would not have chosen Weygand if a wider field of selection had been offered. But, besides the original two, Foch had picked up only a few juniors—among them the officer-interpreter André Tardieu, future Prime Minister of France. As Foch himself said later: "We were like a poor household. There was a staff of five or

six officers, hastily got together, little or no working material, only our notebooks and a few maps."

With these exiguous means of control Foch had to take charge of a force that comprised the IX and XI Army Corps (each of two divisions), the 9th Cavalry Division, and two Reserve divisions—all taken from the Fourth Army. In addition, the 42nd Division, just detraining on arrival from the Verdun area, would come under his command. The XI Corps had suffered badly in the opening shock, the IX Corps was an improvised formation, the two Reserve divisions had already shown ominous "signs of disorder and indiscipline," while the 42nd Division, although of fine quality, was handicapped by its severance from a corps organisation.

Foch's first step was to visit Langle de Cary, whose harassed state of mind was shown in his greeting: "Providence has sent you." To which Foch replied: "All right! All right! We shall see." He found that Langle de Cary could give him little information as to the units of his new command, having practically lost touch with them in the flux of the retreat. Foch soon discovered that the IX Corps on his extreme left had been forced back so far that the bridges over the Aisne at Rethel were uncovered and his flank endangered. He promptly, and characteristically, issued an order for attack—to retake the heights north of the river. His intention was not fulfilled, for the next thing he learnt was that his troops had fallen back still further, and he was compelled to approve a complete withdrawal south of the river.

Next day his "Army Detachment" was well in rear of the rest of the Fourth Army, and the gap between it and the Fifth Army had grown to be some twenty-five miles.

Langle de Cary was proposing, however, to strike back at the enemy, and on the 31st Foch had a telephonic enquiry from Joffre whether he could hold on and cover Langle de Cary's flank. Foch, in reply, held out little hope, on account of his loss of guns and the fatigue of the troops. He suggested that "the only way the detachment could hold out would be by manœuvring in retreat, and this over a depth which would, without doubt, endanger the Fourth Army."

Partly in consequence, Joffre ordered the Fourth Army to give up its project and fall back. Thus it was able to catch up Foch's detachment, which had now slipped back out of reach of the enemy and, freed from the pressure of pursuit, was able to regain both cohesion and contact with the Fifth Army. In some measure, too, the troops recovered from their exhaustion and depression, although hampered by the heavy loss of officers. The two Reserve divisions had been so badly shaken that Foch seized the first chance to pull them out of the line.

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The other, and greater, cause of Joffre's decision had been the renewed recoil of his left wing, after the momentary success of the riposte at Guise. Hence on September 1st he issued new instructions which foreshadowed a far-reaching continuance of the retreat. He defined as its limit a line south of the Rivers Seine, Aube, and Ornain—*i.e.*, away from and southward of Paris. It is true that the instructions said that this limit might not "necessarily be reached," but such pseudo-optimistic qualifications are common in official orders as a means of breaking bad news gently. Joffre's real outlook was shown next day by a note to the army commanders in which he indicated a line drawn still further back on both flanks, so forming a defensive arc, where the armies would "recruit their strength with drafts from the dépôts." The note also spoke of his intention to "organise and fortify" this line. It is clear that he hoped to return to the offensive eventually, rather than early. A commander who is contemplating an early counter-offensive does not place a river obstacle between himself and his target. And when Sir John French, on the 2nd, suggested a stand on the Marne, Joffre replied: "I do not believe it possible to envisage a general action on the Marne," and suggested instead that the British should co-operate "in the defence of Paris." The Sixth Army had already retired within the Paris defences.

It is likely that if the retreat had been continued thus far the French armies would have dissolved. For, unwisely, they had been trained for the *offensive à outrance*, not for a retreating

manœuvre. Already control had lapsed. Higher commanders might issue orders, but, even where these reached the fighting units, they had little effect. To a large extent the retreat was being directed by divisional or brigade commanders, each in his own small zone. In any case, the prospects of a counter-offensive were seriously diminished by the fact that Joffre's new halting-line involved the abandonment of his pivot—Verdun. Happily Sarraill, who had just been appointed to replace Ruffey in command of the pivotal Third Army, was reluctant to obey the instructions. His hesitation helped to save the situation. The other and primary instruments of salvation were the German command and the Governor of Paris.

According to the original plan, Kluck's *First Army*, the flank army, was to sweep round the west side of Paris in its wheel. Instead, it wheeled inwards, before reaching Paris, to cut off Lanrezac. Moltke approved this change of direction less from hope than from fear. Like most timid strategists, he became anxious when his armies stretched out widely, instead of being shoulder to shoulder. He could not appreciate that wideness of extension was a net that baffled and entangled the opponent, paralysing his counter-measures—as it had done twice already, on the frontier and on the Somme. Instead, by seeking to contract both his line and his risk Moltke not only contracted his prospects but exposed himself to a fatal counterstroke. For the flank of the wheeling German line was now to skirt the near side of Paris and pass across the face of the Paris defences.

But the change in Moltke's plan did not end with this step. He seems to have had a belated sense of its danger, and a suspicion that the French were switching troops from their right to their left near Paris. On September 4th he definitely abandoned Schlieffen's plan of general envelopment for a narrower aim. The German centre and left were to close like pincers round Verdun, while the right wing was to turn outwards and face Paris as a shield for these pincers. But Kluck had already crossed the Marne and was echeloned in front instead of behind the other right wing army, Bülow's, so that to fulfil Moltke's order he had to perform a sort of backward somersault. A large army is not

suited to such gymnastic movements. And these did not suit the temperament of Kluck, who saw that his would-be decisive rôle would be converted into a mere protective rôle. So on the 5th he continued his march towards the Seine, saying that "the movement to face west might be made at leisure," and leaving only a weak detachment to guard his outer flank. Next morning it was struck by the French Sixth Army, moving out from Paris.

That stroke was due to the ardent initiative of Galliéni. Joffre had known of Kluck's inward wheel when he gave his own order for a continued retreat. The knowledge made no impression on his plan. But on Galliéni, who only discovered Kluck's movement late on the 3rd, it caused an instant reaction. Early next morning he ordered the Sixth Army to be ready to strike, and spent the day in eager efforts to persuade the British to co-operate and Joffre to sanction the counterstroke. Late that evening his arguments and efforts were crowned with success. Joffre issued an order for the whole left wing to turn about and take the offensive on the 6th. He followed it by a stirring proclamation to the troops, a proclamation of which the original was later found to bear three dates, two already erased !

When the counterstroke was delivered, conditions were ripe for its success. The German right wing had advanced so rapidly that its supplies had failed to keep pace, so that the fatigue of the hard-driven troops, marching daily twenty miles or more under a blazing sun, was increased by hunger. But even their bodily exhaustion was not so bad as the mental exhaustion of the high commanders, fearful of their own apparent success and ever apprehensive of a British landing on the Belgian coast in their rear. Furthermore, the Supreme Command, staying back at Luxembourg, had lost touch with the army commanders, and had the less power to control them because they were each intent on the fulfilment of their personal ambitions. Thus a jar might suffice to cause the breakdown of the German war-machine. And, in the event, this was the result of no more than a jar. In proportion to its scale and its historical effect no decisive battle has seen less fighting than that of the Marne.

Only on the far western flank was the Allied counter-offensive

marked by vigorous action, and here Galliéni's impulsion was handicapped by the poor quality of most of his troops. Yet here, certainly, was the source of the decision. When Galliéni's pressure developed against the Germans' sensitive flank, Kluck was induced to draw off first one part and then the remainder of his army to support his menaced flank guard. Thereby a thirty-mile gap was created between his army and Bülow's. He was emboldened to take the risk because the British had disappeared from his front, carried out of sight by the rapidity of their retreat. This unintentional "vanishing trick" completed the source of the victory. For when they retraced their steps the news that they were approaching the gap proved—by its moral effect on the right wing commanders—the signal for the German retreat, which began on September 9th.

Without derogating from Galliéni's inspired initiative, the German defeat can be traced to the habit of mind formed in peace-time manœuvres. The German commanders were too well trained in conforming to the umpire's decision. On September 9th they had reached a situation where, on manœuvres, the umpire would have ordered a withdrawal. In the absence of an umpire on the actual battlefield, their academic military conscience served as a substitute. They obeyed the inner umpire—and went back. Bülow's army having begun the retreat, the others had no hesitation in conforming. They continued to go back, even though their opponents were slow to come on. What a jest of Fate!

Nor was it the only one. Equally ironical was the distribution of the laurels for the "Victory of the Marne." Galliéni had to wait for his share, the most justified share, until he was dead, when he was deservedly if belatedly promoted Marshal of France. In the meantime Joffre had been decorated by the staff of G.Q.G. with most of the laurel leaves. They were slow to wither, and all the slower perhaps because G.Q.G. had custody of the paper leaves in the files of correspondence. That at least is the accusation levied by numerous post-war critics in France. And it is certain that some of those leaves have never been found. Of the laurel leaves that G.Q.G. could spare, the greater part were bestowed on Foch. Joffre had a just appreciation of his spirit

and his loyalty. Furthermore, he had no reason to be jealous of him, whereas Galliéni was Joffre's designated successor in case of need.

Among all the legends of the Marne that which grew up around Foch's part was the most comprehensive and had the least substance. The first report, which long survived the war, was that Foch decided the issue of the whole battle by a dramatic counterstroke which threw the Prussian Guard "into the marshes of St. Gond." But, in fact, the Germans took leave of him without interference—after the issue had been decided elsewhere.

The second, and more modest, claim is that Foch made the victory possible by preventing a German break-through in the French centre. Even this is not entirely accurate—because the German command was not aiming to break through in the sector where Foch stood. Bülow was merely trying to carry out his new protective task of wheeling to face west; in the course of this wheel, his left wing inevitably bumped against Foch's front. And although Foch had also to bear the assault of part of Hausen's *Third Army*, this army had merely been given the rôle of linking the offensive centre with the new defensive right of the German armies. Hausen's army being composed of Saxons, the Prussians tended to discount its value. Hence, perhaps, its indefinite rôle.

Let us now trace the actual part that Foch played in the Battle of the Marne.

Chapter IX

THE "MIRACLE" OF THE MARNE

JOFFRE'S order for the counter-offensive, although timed 10 p.m. on September 4th, did not reach Foch's headquarters at Fère-Champenoise until six hours later. It indicated that his detachment now constituted a separate army, the Ninth. But the rôle assigned to his army in the order was protective rather than offensive—to "cover the right of the Fifth Army by holding the southern exits of the Marshes of St. Gond, and by sending part of its forces to the plateau north of Sézanne."

The late arrival of the order imperilled its fulfilment, for Foch's army was now about to begin another day's march which would have taken it away from the shelter of the natural obstacle formed by the marshes. But Foch at once sent out liaison officers to stop the movement, and with an order that told the 42nd Division, on the left of the army, to hold the exits of the marshes.

Then he considered his problem, and at 9.30 a.m. issued his instructions. Characteristically, they gave Joffre's order an offensive interpretation. The main weight of the army was to be shifted westwards behind the marshes. But it was not to stay there. The IX Corps and the 42nd Division were to push strong advanced guards over the marshes and be ready to join in the Fifth Army's offensive. The XI Corps was left to hold the sector east of the marshes, which was open and easy of access save for the slight obstacle offered by the little river Somme, a tributary of the Marne. The army thus covered a front of over twenty miles, of which the marshes occupied half. And beyond its right flank was a twenty-mile gap between it and the left of the Fourth Army at Vitry-le-François. Foch placed his cavalry division to fill this gap as well as it could.

His plan was inspired by the idea of actively helping his left-hand neighbour, the Fifth Army. But, in the event, it was to imperil himself. For the Germans shifted their weight east of the marshes, where his natural and numerical strength was least. And as he had attached his two Reserve divisions to his two active Corps, he left himself for the moment with no reserve directly under his own hand. Helpful as was the intention of his plan, its wisdom is questionable. The marshes could only be crossed by four causeways, so they were virtually impassable to any attack in face of opposition. Hence in disposing the bulk of the IX Corps behind them, he placed here more strength than was needed for defence. And his own attempt at offence was soon baulked.

SEPTEMBER 6TH

In the early hours of the 6th the IX Corps endeavoured to carry out its preliminary offensive task. But after crossing the marshes its troops ran into the advancing enemy and were soon driven back to the south side. Foch recognised the inevitable with an order at midday that the IX Corps "should take up a firm defensive attitude and position."

Along the western half of the marshes the assailants had been troops of the German *X Corps*, which, as the left centre of Bülow's army, was then executing its protective wheel. Following on the heels of the French, some of them gained a footing across the marshes, but were then stopped by artillery fire. Another division of the German *X Corps* advanced just west of the marshes and there attacked Foch's left near Mondement. After a day of to-and-fro struggle, his 42nd Division had only ceded a little ground.

Along the eastern half of the marshes the assailants belonged to the German *Guard Corps*, the left wing of Bülow's army. One division of this corps was directed towards the marshes and the other east of them. Seeing how formidable the obstacle was, the corps commander, Plettenberg, soon stopped the attempt to force it. Meantime his other division had forced the line of the Somme without much difficulty. But, as the tired French infantry were falling back, their artillery came to the rescue and discouraged the enemy from further advance. The Prussians next

made an attempt to extend further east and find a way round their opponents' flank. But they did not succeed in finding the flank. Plettenberg then sent a call for help to the neighbouring Saxon army, and decided to wait until its troops had come up. Late in the afternoon one division arrived, but was stopped by artillery fire before reaching the Somme. Thus the day was wasted, whereas if Plettenberg had avoided the marshes and directed his whole corps east of it originally, he might have placed Foch in an awkward plight.

That night, however, Plettenberg decided to side-step both his divisions eastwards, leaving only a handful of troops to guard the causeways. He ordered an attack to be launched soon after day-break.

Foch had a similar intention. For his dominant idea was to fulfil his defensive mission by attacking. If this attitude coincided with his natural instincts, it was also, in his judgment, the best way to prevent the enemy probing the gap between himself and his neighbour. Perhaps he recalled the example of Kettler at Dijon in 1870. In any case his orders on the morning of the 7th were that the 42nd Division on his left was to attack in conjunction with the flank corps of the Fifth Army. In the centre the IX Corps was to make sure of holding the marshes and to be ready to attack. On his right the XI Corps was definitely to attack. The 18th Division, just arriving as a fresh reinforcement, was kept in army reserve and posted in rear of the XI Corps.

SEPTEMBER 7TH

Once more the day was to see a contrast between intention and event. There is also a contrast between the account of it given in Foch's memoirs and that obtained from the German records ; the former tells of an Homeric conflict, while the latter confesses that owing to bungled arrangements and the French artillery fire its intended attacks did not properly develop. But from a comparative analysis of the German and French records a definite outline emerges. It is clear that Bülow planned a " simultaneous concentric attack . . . in the general direction of Sézanne," against the bastion formed by Foch's position. Bülow sought this local

success as a balm for feelings wounded by the necessity of wheeling back his right wing in accordance with the order to take up protective dispositions.

But his *X Corps* made no more than a partial attack, working round the western edge of the marshes and gaining some more ground towards Mondement. It at least forestalled the intended attack of Foch's 42nd Division. Along the marshes both sides were content to face and fire their guns at each other, although the German records mention a small and abortive attack here by two French battalions. East of the marshes the intended attack of the Prussian Guard was largely a fiasco. Shortly before it was to be launched, the French guns opened fire and the French infantry made a strong reconnaissance. Plettenberg mistook this for a general attack and countermanded his own attack, intending to postpone it until a second division of Saxons had come up. But his order was too late to stop some of the battalions, which, attacking unsupported, suffered heavily. This set-back had a moral effect on the renewal of the attack early in the afternoon. *The troops delivered it half-heartedly and abandoned it after a sharp pommelling by the French artillery, although their advance induced the French to fall back from the defensive line of the river.*

It is interesting to compare the impressions of the opposing sides as to this sector. On the German side we read the admission—"The French artillery had an unexpected effect, and remained uncontested victor. The intended attack was everywhere nipped in the bud. . . . The 7th of September was the worst day in the war so far for the troops." Yet Foch's view was that, after the first German attack—"The situation was already critical and might quickly become worse, for it was evident that the troops were on the verge of giving way."

To stimulate them he applied a dual remedy. Firstly, he informed them that "On the left wing of the Army the enemy appears to be giving way." He also said that the German opposition to his right wing "had no other object than to delay the approaching moment when the line opposite to us will in its turn retreat. The situation is therefore excellent." This intimation

was encouraging, if not true to the facts—for the Germans were as deliberately wheeling back on his left as they were definitely intending to wheel forward on his right. In the second place, he repeated his order for the XI Corps to attack, and lent a brigade from his reserve to help it. But the troops do not seem to have cared for the taste of this remedy, and did not attack. Foch was much annoyed at their non-compliance with his order, but in the light of the morrow it was perhaps all to the good. He had not the strength to gain success, and a successful attack would have still further impoverished troops whose endurance was already at a low ebb. The next day was to be critical; it might easily have proved fatal.

On the night of the 7th Foch merely repeated his previous orders, but added, in expectation of the enemy's retreat, that "at dawn reconnaissances are to be pushed out along the whole front to ascertain definitely what points are still occupied by the enemy." His expectation was to be falsified before daybreak, and it would seem that the optimistic suggestion contained in the last clause contributed to the surprise which his troops suffered.

The same night a momentous discussion was taking place behind the German lines. Fear of the French artillery was so strong that, as the only way of evading its power, General von Hausen proposed to make "an assault in the grey of the morning" with the bayonet. Plettenberg was aghast at the suggestion, but eventually agreed. The plan was certainly unconventional and hazardous, for the troops were leaden with lack of sleep, and they had no time for preparation nor any clear idea where the French positions lay. Yet in the issue the risk was justified and originality repaid.

SEPTEMBER 8TH

At 4 30 a.m., without a gun firing, the German infantry filed across the Somme, deployed, and moved stumblingly forward. The French were taken utterly by surprise, and soon all three divisions of the XI Corps were rushing pell-mell backwards, sweeping Foch's reserve division, the 18th, along with them in their disordered retreat. It was not stopped, and all efforts to rally the troops failed, until they were some six miles back. They

were then well south of Fère-Champenoise—so far, indeed, that Foch's advanced headquarters at Pleurs was almost in the front line.

Happily for Foch, the Germans were slow to catch up so rapid a retreat. Most of them halted on reaching the vacated French position—the extra distance travelled by the French infantry is a vivid illustration of the multiplicatory effect of surprise! The consequence of the Germans' early halt was that they failed to capture all but a fraction of the French guns. Thus these survived to torment them again, and to discourage them from further advance; all the more because their own artillery was slow to come up.

Five hours later, just after midday, Plettenberg ordered a further advance. But his divisional commanders made no attempt to comply with his orders, although some of their units pushed forward independently and occupied the deserted village of Fère-Champenoise. The Saxon divisions made no greater attempt to exploit the success; one was content to reorganise along the railway embankment just beyond the Somme, and the other only pushed on far enough to send an exculpatory report that it could see no sign of the French. The "victorious" Germans, in fact, had merely staggered forward like blind-drunk men, and were unable to give the Higher Command any light on the situation beyond reports of their own "extreme exhaustion."

What of Foch meantime? When the news of the collapse reached him he ordered the XI Corps to reoccupy Fère-Champenoise, and told the commander, Eydoux, that the 18th Division was placed under him for the purpose. But such orders were utterly vain in the actual circumstances. His other step was to telephone an appeal for help to the neighbouring armies. He applied first to the Fourth Army on his right, but Langle de Cary replied that he was too fully engaged, and that the interval between the armies was too wide for him to render aid. He, indeed, was faced with the real German attempt at a break-through.

Foch then telephoned to his left-hand neighbour, the Fifth Army, asking its commander to renew his attack alongside the left wing of the Ninth Army. It should be noted that Foch at this

time only asked for indirect assistance. And it should be mentioned that, on the previous day, Bülow's right wing had made the first stage of its wheel back so tranquilly that at dusk "not an enemy was to be seen"—a fact which suggests that the French Fifth Army's unopposed advance had been leisurely.

Franchet d'Esperey, who had just been given command of the Fifth Army in place of Lanrezac, answered Foch's appeal with an assurance that he would pursue his advance. He also ordered the X Corps on his right to incline north-eastward, which would tend to ease the pressure on Foch. But the only appreciable progress that day was made by his left.

Although Foch's memoirs speak of a successful attack in the morning by his 42nd Division alongside his neighbour's X Corps, the Germans opposite them say that they did not see any French infantry. The explanation would seem to be that the French advance was made across the empty space between the two sides. And across part of it only. For in the afternoon the Germans made a small advance near the western edge of the marshes, which carried their line south of the Petit Morin, and they confess that they had had no real fighting to justify their halt.

The IX Corps in Foch's centre had less luck than his left. Bülow had brought a division from his extreme western flank by a forced march to assist the *Guard Corps*. Its leading brigade crossed the marshes by a single causeway, meeting only a few snipers. The brigade was then shelled, however, not only by the French, but by its own heavy artillery. After a time it got under way again, and the French Moroccan division facing it fell back some distance.

The French defence of the marshes was hampered by the crisis on the right flank. For early in the morning Foch had sent the commander of the IX Corps, Dubois, "repeated warnings to the following effect: 'The vital point for your Corps today is its right, where you must give the XI Corps your full support. You will therefore move all your available troops in this direction, including those in the centre which are not at present engaged.'"

Dubois had protested that there were signs of an imminent

attack on his own front, but Foch had swept aside his excuses with the assurance that the guns he heard were merely those of the 42nd Division which "continues to advance with ease." His protest thus overridden, the commander of the IX Corps moved two of his three divisions, the 17th and 52nd, to take up an oblique line on his flank west and south-west of Fère-Champenoise.

Foch devoted his main efforts during the day to urging and organising a counter-attack to regain this place. But when finally delivered, in the afternoon, it came to no more than a demonstration by two regiments of the 52nd Division. Nevertheless, their appearance and their fire caused such a panic among the Prussian Guard near the village that "it was 9.15 p.m. before complete order was restored."

That night, Foch concluded his report to Joffre with the words: "The situation is therefore excellent; the attack directed against the Ninth Army appears to be a means to assure the retreat of the German right wing." This was the phrase magnified by legend into the famous message: "My right is driven in, my centre is giving way, the situation is excellent, I attack." Actually, a significant change in Foch's outlook is to be detected. Hitherto he had stimulated his harassed subordinates with the refrain "attaquez," emphasised by dramatic gestures; when they hesitated, or besought reinforcements, he had hurled at them more vehemently the order to attack. But in his orders for the 9th there was a change of tune. His troops were told "to organise as strongly as possible the positions they held," and the only hint of attack was the reiteration that "Fère-Champenoise should be occupied."

Foch's anxiety was still more clearly shown by the fact that soon after 9 p.m. he telephoned to the Fifth Army and asked Franchet d'Esperey to relieve the 42nd Division by taking over its front with his X Corps. However serious Foch's situation, this was a very serious request to make. For Foch's allotted rôle was to cover and assist the Fifth Army, which was engaged in the decisive attack.

Franchet d'Esperey, although embarrassed, responded to

Foch's appeal with remarkable generosity and self-abnegation. He not only agreed to relieve the 42nd Division, but placed his own X Corps at Foch's disposal, apparently feeling that only the man who was commanding the spot and knew the situation exactly could carry out a relief. But by divesting himself of a fifth of his army, Franchet d'Esperey inevitably reduced his own offensive effort next day. And the 9th was to be the crucial day of the Battle of the Marne—the day when the entry of the British and Franchet d'Esperey's left into the gap between Bülow and Kluck led these German Armies to begin a definite retreat. Thus Foch's appeal had far-spreading ripples. A critical analyst might even say that he, rather than his own opponent, helped "to assure the retreat of the German right wing."

Of equal, if narrower, significance is the use Foch made of the troops thus obtained. The X Corps was primarily to safeguard his left flank, although it was ordered to continue "the attacks begun by" the 42nd Division. The 42nd Division when relieved was to move along behind his front "to the line Linthcs-Pleurs" in his centre, "where the division will be formed in army reserve." Thus his object in seeking the relief of this division appears to have been primarily that of providing himself with a reserve under his own hand, hitherto lacking. There is no suggestion of using it for a decisive counter-manceuvre, although he seems to have had the idea, mentioned next morning, of using it "to take part in an attack on Fère-Champenoise." He regarded the reoccupation of this village as essential to his defensive line and plan. His attitude at the time was epitomised in his subsequent reflection: "When one knows what one wills everything becomes easy. To stop up gaps one fills them up with mud. . . . It is incredible what one achieves by this system."

If he had been contemplating a decisive stroke, such as legend later pictured, he might have taken an alternative course—that of launching the 42nd Division, on relief, directly eastwards along the south side of the marshes to roll up his assailants' flank and menace their rear. This course, if more speculative, would at least have saved time, have saved the detour behind

his front, and have had greater potential effect. In contrast, by moving the 42nd Division to a position behind his centre its attack would inevitably be frontal.

SEPTEMBER 9TH

When morning came on the 9th, Foch's plan of moving the 42nd Division to his centre was for a time endangered—in a purely accidental way. Bülow's overnight orders were that his right wing should continue its wheel back; that his centre, acting as the pivot, should simply stand fast; and that the *Guard Corps* on his left wing should continue its offensive attempt to wheel forward. But owing to a misunderstanding one regiment in the centre advanced on its own in the morning mist for nearly two miles. It went as far as Mondement and captured the Château, evicting the party of Humbert's Moroccan Division who had been holding it. Rumour magnified the coup into a formidable attack. This guise it assumes in popular history, and in this guise Humbert not unnaturally saw it at the moment.

Foch, who went up to see Humbert, has paid tribute to his personal calm and the reassurance he gave to his shaken troops. The fact remains that Humbert not only called for and obtained the last remaining reserve of the IX Corps, but also a fraction of the 42nd Division. With the former he launched a counter-attack in the afternoon, and although this failed he regained the Château in the evening. The final storming of the Château has become a French epic, but it cannot be reconciled with the records of the German regiment in possession, which mention that they evacuated the Château as part of the general retirement and without interference from the French. Reconciliation, however, is unimportant now that the insignificance of the episode is discovered. And whatever his apprehensions, Foch did not let the apparent menace deter him from moving the 42nd Division to his centre.

There and on his right a very real danger had arisen. Although the orders were delayed by broken cable-lines, the two Prussian Guard divisions and three Saxon divisions had resumed their attack at 8.45 a.m. Tired as they were, the six French divisions

facing them were in even worse state. The XI Corps broke first, although its left division withstood the bombardment until it discovered that its flank was bare. Its retreat in turn exposed the flank of the IX Corps, on the left, which hitherto had only fallen back a short distance—to Connantre. Foch's line now formed an L, chipped in the middle.

"With the object of encouraging our troops," Foch announced later, "the 42nd Division is coming up. . . . 'The fact that the XI Corps has been obliged to yield ground will in no way prevent us from resuming the offensive with this division, which will attack towards Connantre and Œuvy. The IX Corps will co-operate by attacking the Morains-Fère-Champenoise road. The 42nd Division . . . will be ready to attack about noon.'" This hope was to be disappointed, and the instructions to the IX Corps must have sounded rather ironical to the hard-pressed troops, if it reached their ears. By another proclamation at mid-day, as Foch relates, "I tried to communicate to them my complete confidence in our ultimate success." It read thus :

"Reports . . . show that the German Army . . . has reached the extreme limit of its endurance. . . . It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of taking advantage of this situation, and I ask each one of you to draw upon that last spark of energy which in its moments of supreme trial has never been denied to our race. The disorder in the enemy's ranks is the forerunner of victory. By continuing with the greatest energy the effort already begun we are certain to stop the march of the enemy and then drive him from the soil of our country. But everyone must be convinced that success belongs to him who holds out longest. The honour and safety of France are in the balance. One more effort and you are sure to win."

It was a stirring appeal, if the reference to the enemy's disorder may have had a fresh flavour of irony to troops who were retreating in front of him. Again, it must have seemed to them that only a miracle could make Foch's assurance credible.

Yet that miracle came to pass. Its initiation took place just before Foch made his appeal, and its effect on his front began less than two hours later, although his troops were not aware

of it until many hours later—and then, naturally, misunderstood it. At the time they were only aware of an imminent menace, before which the IX Corps fell back and the XI Corps made a fresh recoil. "In all ranks there was no question but of retirement." This was presumably the time when, it is said, Eydoux frankly told Foch that it was now too late to expect an orderly retirement, only to receive the reply: "You say you cannot hold on, and that you cannot withdraw, so the only thing left is to attack."

The 42nd Division was now reported to be arriving. So at 1.45 p.m. Foch issued his final orders for its attack, to start at 4 p.m. He followed this by orders to the XI and IX Corps to attack in conjunction with it, while the X Corps co-operated on the far left. These attack orders were to be carried out "*under any and all circumstances.*"

Foch sent Weygand to arrange the practical details and give the final decision. After consultation with the commanders of the IX Corps and the 42nd Division, Dubois and Grossetti, Weygand postponed the hour until 5.15 p.m. Seven divisions were to be launched, and the arrival of the 42nd Division in the battle-line was to be the signal for the general advance.

But once more events belied both anticipation and subsequent legend. The 42nd Division "arrived too late to be able to engage its infantry before nightfall and only its artillery came into action." Grossetti considered that it was folly to launch his men over unknown country in the dark. The dead-beat XI Corps naturally did not move in advance of the signal. Thus the grand assault dwindled down to the advance of one brigade of the 17th Division on the IX Corps' front. But it met no Germans.

Nearly four hours earlier the German divisions had been suddenly halted in their advance by the receipt of Bülow's order for a general retreat—due to the alarming news that "four long columns" (actually the British 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Divisions) were marching through the open gap between himself and Kluck. Thus salvation came to Foch's men through the turn of events elsewhere, if also through their own guns, which, as on the fronts of all the armies, gave the defence domination over the attack, acting as the candle-snuffer of the German will to advance.

How supreme the irony that Foch should have owed salvation to the conquest of the moral by the material !

The German troops were assembled, under cover of rear-guards, and set off on their backward march, all of them very tired, but many of them highly disgusted. The rearguard of the *1st Guard Division* was called in at 8 p.m. ; after having a meal from the field-kitchens, it heard "a few shots of the French artillery well to the west." This coincides with Grossetti's candid statement that his division only arrived in time to fire its guns in the twilight at the retiring enemy. The Saxon rearguards stayed on the Somme until daylight without seeing any pursuers. For the brigade of the French 17th Division directed its advance towards Morains le Petit at the eastern end of the marshes, where it arrived before daybreak. This is the only apparent foundation for the legend of the Prussian Guard being driven into the marshes, unless this arose from the French artillery's warm reception of the tentative advance made on the first day.

Foch, presumably, was not aware of the way his much-urged attack had been modified in execution, or of the reason for the German retirement. For even his memoirs, written long after the war, contain no hint of the facts, nor any realisation that it was not "a famous victory." Perhaps time had lent enchantment to the legend in the post-war years. For in 1915, when describing his part to Baron André de Maricourt, he painted a more modest and rather more accurate picture : "The first days I was beaten. The last day it was a question of holding on. Yet I advanced four miles. Why ? I don't know. A good deal because of my men. A little because I had the will—and then, God was there."

He had certainly owed much to Providence. His own best part in the battle had been in the realm of the spirit, and there is no reason to doubt the intimate recital of it he gave later. " ' You want to break me,' I thought. ' You shall not do it. I'll withdraw if I must, but as little as possible. If my right wing is attacked, I'll hold on by my left ; but you shall not pass.' I was filled with a wild obstinacy." " I saw with the utmost distinctness the mission of sacrifice on which my troops were embarked. It was an almost

physical vision startling in its clearness, blindingly bright. . . . I kept on saying to myself, 'Even if I have to yield ground slightly, my front must at all costs be maintained.' " Such an attitude compels admiration—for Foch as an individual. But to its effect on the battle there were limitations, as an historical analysis shows. The brightness of his own "vision" certainly blinded him to the facts of the situation, and, paradoxically, obscured the very object to which he had dedicated his sacrifice.

Towards midnight on the 9th, according to what he later told Le Goffic, he was suddenly called to the telephone and heard a voice saying: "We are in the station at Fère-Champenoise." "I gave a start—'Who do you mean by We?' 'Colonel Simon of Moussy's division.' And Moussy himself didn't know it, nor Dubois! These are the surprises of war. I answered, 'Well done! Bravo! Push on! Push on!' And at the same time I called to all my divisions—'General advance! Forward, Grossetti! Forward, Humbert! Forward, Battesti! Forward, Lefèvre! You can't do more, Radiguet? I don't care what you say: at 5.30 all your units must be in action. Go along! I don't wish to know anything.' To be sure, each had good reasons for dropping out. I was deaf to it all, because one throws in everything, one ought to throw in everything, at moments like that."

SEPTEMBER 10TH

Foch himself went forward to Fère-Champenoise shortly before midday on the 10th. "I've never seen such a sight. Literally, one couldn't get along in a car, or on horseback, or on foot, the streets were so littered with broken bottles. Ah! They'd had a carouse the night before, *messieurs les Boches*, such a carouse that hundreds of them were sleeping off their wine in their cellars. I saw some of them on the house-tops running like cats and being brought down with a flying shot. And I also saw Dubois, commander of my IX Corps, one of whose units had achieved this pretty little surprise against Fère, coming to meet me, his injured big toe sticking straight out of his boot. He was with his Chief of Staff, Nourrisson. 'Ah! you see, Dubois, Nourrisson, things aren't going too badly. Well, to work! There's still something

to do.' I wanted to push on at once to Morains, but Colonel Coffec interposed: 'Don't think of that, General. The road is enfiladed behind the crest by the Boche artillery. It's doubtful if we're even safe in the station here.' 'All right, then, let's go to the station!' The roof was burning above our heads while we were studying our maps. The beams were crackling. One paid no attention." It should be added that this fire was not due to enemy shelling, for the Germans were now much further away than Foch realised. The station had been set on fire and was still smouldering.

Foch was busily occupied in trying to accelerate the pursuit, which had slackened or come to a standstill when the tired French troops made touch anew with some of the enemy rear-guards that afternoon. "It was hard labour. I could do no more at the end of the day." He established himself for the night in the town hall. "Weygand and I lay down on horrible mattresses. There was an infernal noise. We could hear people going up and down that wooden staircase which was over our heads. There was no chance of sleep. At one o'clock in the morning they came and disturbed me to announce that G.Q.G. was making me a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour. I replied: 'What do you suppose I care about that just now? Let me sleep.' At three o'clock an emissary from General Joffre came to bring us some cigars. I said to him, 'Put them on the mantelpiece,' but he also brought some blankets. They were priceless. We each took one and rolled ourselves up in them. It was so cold that we put on all our coats in vain; we were frozen all the same. . . . But no one brought any news."

According to Weygand this was the only night during the war on which Foch missed his sleep until the night when the Armistice was being settled. And according to Weygand the cause was Foch's anxiety to know if the bridges across the Marne were free for his pursuit. But, as we have seen, Foch gave to Le Goffic and Bugnet a more human and less military reason for his sleepless vigil. During it the cigars became a comfort—"for eight days past we had not been able to get a scrap of tobacco."

At nightfall on the 10th Foch's Army had only reached the

general line of the Somme, a bare eight-mile advance, although a few detachments had gone further. The Marne was still over fifteen miles ahead. In an attempt, apart from vibrant orders, to quicken the pursuit, Foch had ordered his cavalry to push on ahead of his right flank straight for Châlons. His original cavalry division had now been reinforced by a second, and he hoped that the Cavalry Corps thus formed would prove a strong instrument of pursuit. He had also "collected at Fère-Champenoise all the lorries that were available, in order to rush infantry to such bridges as might be reported as still intact." Hence his anxiety during the night for the news that did not come. He was naturally the more impatient because news had come from Franchet d'Espèry that the divided right wing of the enemy was retreating in divergent directions, and Joffre was urging an effort to concentrate against the two fractions before they could coalesce. Foch himself, moreover, had a chance of penetrating between the armies of Bülow and Hausen.

But on the 11th, "the march of our columns, notwithstanding the absence of any enemy reaction, had become rather slow." Weariness and rain were causes of delay. But not the only cause. Whatever Foch's delusions as to the situation during the battle, he realised now how fast the enemy were slipping out of reach, and later shed light on the ineffectiveness of the pursuit.

"After the Marne, most of the generals were so 'flummoxed' at having won that they did not dare to do anything more. . . . They were afraid that the situation might change. . . . I sent ahead a general with a Cavalry Division to pursue the Germans. He stopped at the first bridge, and formed up *en cercle* with a Cavalry Corps. . . . When I arrived I asked him, 'What! are you still here? Haven't you advanced?' 'No,' he replied, 'they are much too strong for me! They are overwhelming. . . . I can't sabre them all.'

"'But that,' I replied, 'is not what I am asking you to do. You've got guns; you ought to have used them. . . .' When I saw that he didn't understand at all, and that there was no way of making him understand, I got rid of him: 'Off with you! We shall never understand each other.'

"They dared not do anything. They ought to have pushed and pushed! They refused to believe in their success. That the troops should fail to understand it, I'm not surprised. But those who led them? Intolerable! . . . During the night of the 11th to 12th I saw an Infantry Divisional Commander [Lefèvre, commanding the 18th] who had received orders to advance and had halted before Châlons. He did not dare to enter. And at the *Haute-Mère Dieu* hotel there was the Crown Prince of Saxony and his staff having a final beano. He might have wiped up the whole lot! . . . I went myself to shake them up, to lead them with a stick. Ah! If only I had been there! A column to right, a column to left, another in the centre, and I could have caught them all." A true Gascon touch.

"Yes! one has to lead them with a cudgel. They were superb generals in peace-time, fine soldiers, who knew everything except war. . . . The war they had prepared for, on manœuvres, was a perfectly conventional war. But what they were called on to do wasn't in the regulations. Poor old regulations! They're all very well for purposes of drill, but in the hour of danger they're no more use."

Although the bridge at Châlons was undamaged, as well as two others above, Foch's Army did not cross the Marne until the morning of the 12th, and then, in his own words, "very slowly." Most ludicrous of all, the Cavalry Corps, directed on the same bridge as the left-wing Infantry Divisions of the Fourth Army, did not cross until after them. Foch had ordered his Cavalry Corps to strike north-eastward beyond the Marne, against the flank and rear of the enemy, who were falling back in front of the Fourth Army. But, in consequence of the delay, "these had been able to retire in almost complete security, and the cavalry had to limit itself merely to following the rearguards which the columns left behind to cover their retreat."

Foch was in such a bad temper at the delay that, when a lieutenant named Laune, stammering with excitement, came to tell him that the 2nd Chasseurs had entered Châlons, he angrily replied: "Get out, sir. When you're capable of articulating your words properly, you can return."

But his mood had softened when he made his own entry into the town, soon after midday. Ever sensitive to the call of his religion, he is reported to have turned aside the fervent thanks of the Bishop of Châlons with the response : "Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam."

He had early need of the consolation of religion. And gave early proof of the strength of his faith. For next day the belated news came to him, passed on by General Sarrail, that his son Germain and his son-in-law, Captain Bécourt, were dead. Both had fallen on the same day, August 22nd, and close together, in the first shock of the encounter with the German sweep through Belgium. Foch for a moment trembled under the shock of the sorrow. He asked his staff to leave him alone in his office. Half an hour passed and he called them back with the curt words : "Now let's get on with our work." Sympathy then and thereafter he brushed aside with the remark : "Yes, yes, never mind that." But his real feelings, and the source of his endurance, were shown in a letter a week later to his old chief, General Millet. "The affairs of my family are grievous. Bécourt and my son were killed on the 22nd of August near Yprecourt, on the Belgian frontier. I heard of it on the 13th, and I have discreetly broken the news to my wife, who is still at Ploujean. One ought to disregard everything, and yet I quake as I think of the disturbance which is bound to occur there, to the grief of my poor women-folk. For my part I am steeling myself on this subject so as not to fail in my duty. The cruel sacrifice we are making ought not to remain sterile. I am working to this end with all the energy of which I am capable, absolutely full of confidence in the issue of the fight, with the help of God."

When he wrote this letter his troops had been blocked, since the 14th, on a front that ran through Souain and Perthes, due east of Reims and only some fifteen miles north of Châlons. The armies on Foch's left were likewise held up along the line of the Aisne. Vain efforts to advance had merely, apart from serious loss, disclosed the presence of a well-planned and entrenched position. On this line, save for minor fluctuations, the Germans were to stand throughout the next four years.

Yet on September 21st Foch actually wrote : " Things go well. The enemy is retiring all along the line, but the men are scarcely able to make the effort that I want of them." It is clear that Foch did not realise that trench warfare had begun, sealing with barbed wire and machine-guns the triumph of defence over attack. It was the first time in the war that the Germans had stood on the defensive. The French might have deduced, from their recent defensive success under unfavourable conditions, the solidity of the resistance they would meet from an army better prepared than their own for defence. Trenches cancelled the superiority of the French field artillery by nullifying the effect of the " 75." The instrument of their salvation on the Marne, it became a blunt tool when the attack had to be launched against an entrenched position.

The attempt was all the more hopeless because, coincidentally with the end of the pursuit, Joffre had sent orders to husband ammunition, especially high explosive shell—the only shell of any use against trenches. At the same time, with curious logic, he ordered the carrying out of " methodical attacks." Foch fulfilled these orders with fruitless loyalty until, happily for his troops, the enemy in turn tried an offensive on September 26th. Happily also this had been foiled by the time a new message came from Joffre, saying that the shortage of ammunition, already critical, might " soon become tragic." In consequence, Foch would receive no more 75 mm. shells for two or three weeks. This fact compelled Foch to cease attacking and to give his men respite.

A week later he bade farewell to them. For on October 4th he was summoned to Joffre's headquarters, to receive once more a higher rôle in a new zone of action. It was the outcome of the new mirage that attracted Joffre's ever-hopeful eyes after the dispersion of his latest.

On September 13th, the very day that his armies came up against the enemy's defensive position, Joffre had telegraphed to the Government : " Our victory is pronouncing itself as more and more complete and brilliant. The enemy is in full retreat . . . and our advanced guards are treading on the heels of the adver-

sary without giving him a moment to pull himself together." By the following day he discovered that his own troops had been pulled up hard, and had stuck fast. He explained it, as we learn from Poincaré, by the suggestion that "the Germans had no option but to accept battle, and it is our vigorous pursuit which compelled them to do it." When the armies had been halted nearly a week, G.Q.G. was still "drafting daily communiqués so buoyantly optimistic that if Millerand did not correct and water them down, public opinion might be nourished day after day with mere illusions."

Because of his own illusions, perhaps, it was not until the 17th that Joffre decided on an attempt to turn the flank of the German position. By then the German armies had recovered cohesion, and the German command was expecting and ready to meet what was now the obvious, the too obvious, manœuvre.

Joffre had already hampered its prospects by resuming, on the 11th, direct control of Maunoury's Sixth Army on the extreme left, leaving Galliéni to fret his soul within the confines of Paris while watching the fruits of victory slip from the grasp of his slow-thinking superior. Throughout the battle Galliéni's governing idea had been to direct all reserves to the north—towards the enemy's rear. But with his displacement the pursuit became a purely frontal advance to the Aisne.

Moreover, the belated initial attempt to turn this trench-line was made by reinforcing Maunoury with a single army corps. Naturally it had no effect. The second attempt, meantime in preparation, was not much larger, although nominally made by a new army. Joffre brought two army corps, as well as the commander, Castelnau, from Lorraine, but he made up the army by taking two corps away from Maunoury. By September 24th Castelnau's outflanking move came to a stop on the Somme, and although reinforced by two more corps was itself so threatened that Castelnau showed an inclination to fall back south of the river. Joffre therefore formed a new Tenth Army, again chiefly by subtraction—from Castelnau—and placed it under Maud'huy with orders for a renewed attempt to overlap the

German flank. Meantime the British, at their own request, were to be transferred from the Aisne to Flanders.

But the limitation of Joffre's vision is shown by the fact that when Henry Wilson, having persuaded Sir John French with difficulty to take the risk, went to see Joffre on the 29th, he found that G.Q.G. were *strongly opposed to the idea*. Joffre preferred that the British should try a new frontal attack on the Chemin-des-Dames ridge beyond the Aisne. But after sleeping on the proposal he came round to its acceptance, and on the night of October 1st the British Army began, by graduated steps, to slip out of the line on the Aisne for its movement northward.

This inter-allied process of side-slipping, together with Joffre's disquietude over Castelnau's intentions, had a reaction on Foch's position. On September 24th Joffre had asked the Government for authority to appoint Foch as his assistant, and successor in case of accident. If the request was a proof of the good impression that Joffre had derived from Foch's conduct on the Marne, there can be little doubt that it was also inspired by a desire to rid himself of the greater risk of being superseded by Galliéni, who held the official letter of appointment as Joffre's contingent successor. This risk had been increased by Galliéni's part, which might become known, in bringing about the Marne victory, and by Galliéni's obvious dissatisfaction with the way that strategic success had been exploited. In contrast, Joffre did not fear any rivalry from Foch. It was the judgment of some in the inner circle of G.Q.G. that Joffre singled out Foch because he felt that Foch was the only one among the higher generals on whose loyalty to himself he could fully depend.

But when Joffre's request was submitted to the Cabinet, its members were in a quandary. They felt that they could not "brush aside the Commander-in-Chief's request," but also could not take away "the official letter" from Galliéni "without wounding him." Hence they deferred a decision. Joffre then suggested a middle course that was facilitated by the course of events. He would appoint Foch his assistant for the purpose of co-ordinating the outflanking moves, but without a definite

promise of the succession to himself. Hence his summons of October 4th.

By 4 p.m. Foch was at Joffre's new headquarters at Romilly-sur-Seine. His mission was explained to him. He was to take control of Castelnau's and Maud'huy's armies and co-ordinate their moves with those of the British and Belgian armies. "Go and see the situation, and do your best."

Chapter X

THE WATCHMAN OF YPRES

FOCH lost no time in beginning his new task. At 7 p.m. he was back at Châlons; by 10 p.m. he had handed over command of his Army to Humbert and was on his way north. Weygand accompanied him—a proof that confidence was now established. At 4.30 a.m. on October 5th they reached Breteuil in Picardy. Sending word to Castelnau that he had arrived, Foch lay down on a bench in the school-house. Soon Castelnau came in, looking very grave, and explained that he had decided to retire behind the Somme, as his exhausted troops could not hold out against superior force, and were “almost done for.”

Foch instantly reacted. “To withdraw you is impossible; it’s essential to hold on at any cost and to die rather than give up an inch of ground. No reasoning will avail in face of the exigencies of the situation. I take entire responsibility; my decision is irrevocable, here’s the order in writing.” “All right, then,” replied Castelnau, “we’ll stay where we are.” They discussed the situation for two hours, drinking black coffee to banish sleepiness.

Taking leave of Castelnau, Foch dashed on northward to Aubigny, where Maud’huy had his command post. The situation of his army seemed even more precarious, and discouragement was manifest on the faces of the staff. Entering “like a gust of wind,” Foch extended his arms and cried: “Maud’huy, I embrace you for all you’ve done, and for all you will do—you hear what I say, *for all that you will do!*”

Then, turning to the staff, he said with a pointed gesture: “Clear out!” They did not await a repetition of the order, but

from outside heard him say, his voice rising : " I won't hear anything ! You understand ! I won't hear anything ! I'm deaf ! I only know three ways of fighting—Attack—Hold on—Clear out. I forbid the last. Choose between the first two."

It would seem, however, that Foch's intervention merely reinforced a fresh resolution that was due to news of reinforcements. Maud'huy, a survival from the age of chivalry, who made his sons pray nightly that they grew up like Bayard and du Guesclin, needed less touch of the spur than Castelnau, who had been sobered by his opening experience in Lorraine. Foch arranged with Maud'huy that he should " check forthwith the enemy's advance on Arras," while " continuing the effort to envelop the enemy's flank " towards Lens.

Foch then went back to Breteuil. Next morning he went to see Maud'huy again, and, on being told that progress was slight and resistance difficult, he brusquely replied : " Get smashed to the last man, but hold on like leeches. No retirement. Every man to the attack." He then drove to Doullens, town of fateful significance in his future career, where he established his own headquarters. There he had an urgent telephone message from Castelnau, who said that he had been heavily attacked and asked Foch to go at once to Breteuil, as he anticipated that " his line was on the point of breaking somewhere." On arrival Foch found that although the troops had been driven back, the enemy had not followed up his advantage. Once more Foch forbade any change of plan, simply ordering the troops to dig in. And happily the Germans did not renew their offensive in the morning. They in turn were planning a new and wider manœuvre.

Foch was thus able to return to his own headquarters, having travelled 530 miles in the past fifty-seven hours, and enjoy a comparative rest. During the next few days he busied himself successfully towards renewing, unsuccessfully, the offensive effort of Castelnau and Maud'huy. At the price of further exhaustion to the French troops, it left the Germans securely established on the high ground north and south of Arras, and did not prevent them pursuing their northward manœuvre. With such

a limited ammunition supply this frontal effort was foredoomed.

A significant sidelight on the attitude of Foch's subordinates is provided by Mayer, who was then serving in a corps on the Somme: "I find in my war-diary that, the village of Monchy-au-Bois having been wrested from us on 8th October, 1914, Foch directed General Brugère, who commands us, to recapture this locality at 7 a.m. next day, a task that was not executed. Whence reiteration on the 9th of the previous order. Same in-success. This continued for several days following, nobody dreaming of obeying, and everybody being amused at the obstinacy which made the headquarters at Doullens repeat the same injunctions. Our generals, holding that they were impossible to carry out, never tried to conform with them."

Foch's own reason for giving such orders was expressed in a conversation with General Maurin at Doullens: "To all pleas I always reply: '*Attaquez ! Attaquez !*' They look at me with astonishment ; but the goal is attained. I have thus converted, to the offensive, spirits that were longing for rest and perhaps even a rearward movement." But as he did not succeed in changing the enemy's disposition, it is difficult to see what goal he attained. That conversation shed more light on his personal feelings. Speaking of the weariness of certain commanders—Castelnau was obviously in discussion—Maurin referred to the family bereavements that some had already suffered. Foch replied: "They are not the only ones !" And then with a gesture that seemed to sweep aside remembrance, added: "One will think of that after victory has been won." Maurin saw a tear in his eye. But that was Foch's sole concession to human weakness.

On October 8th Sir John French and his staff called to see Foch at Doullens on their way north. Wilson noted in his diary: "Here a guard of honour and bugle, and Foch kissed me twice in front of the whole crowd ! Foch absolutely full of fight." Even more important was the impression made on Sir John French, who had already called on Castelnau and found him "anxious and depressed." "We left him after half an hour's visit and reached General Foch's headquarters at Doullens about

four. He gave me a great reception with Guard of Honour, etc. He was the exact opposite to Castelnau. He says the enemy is making no headway anywhere, and that he is gradually getting round his flank in the north." "He gave me a kind of tea and champagne party." "It gave me great hope for the future to find him so hopeful and cheery. I explained my plans to him. . . . He was quite pleased and only begged me to come in on his left as early as possible."

From this first wartime meeting is to be traced the strong influence which Foch gained over the British Commander-in-Chief. Just as the reception was nicely calculated to appeal to French's ever-sensitive vanity, so the note of confidence was aptly attuned to the vibrations of his mind. On the one hand, French was nursing the delusion that by going to the "plains of Flanders" he would find scope for manoeuvre—through yet another mirage he apparently visualised that flat and water-logged land, cut up into small fields and criss-crossed with drainage dykes, as "good cavalry country." On the other hand, he was nursing both a grievance against and a doubt of the French. The grievance, which dated from August 23rd, had been fomented by Joffre's recent action in complaining to the British Government of French's inactivity on the Aisne. Only two days before he came to Doullens he had vented his feelings on Huguet, the chief liaison officer with the British: "Never throughout my career have I suffered such humiliation; I have had to come to France to fight for the French for it to be inflicted; I never will forget it." Hence the "perfect tact and deference" which Foch showed him "were particularly pleasing." As Huguet adds: "However strange the proposition might be to which Sir John French's changeable nature and overflowing imagination led him, the General never countered with a refusal or a criticism. His first words were always of approval; then he brought his questioner round gently. . . ."

But the balm to his vanity did not suffice to calm French's doubts. By going on the left would he be once again exposed by his allies? Would he run the risk that he had so narrowly escaped when he originally went on the left at Mons? Foch's air was just

the tonic to give him reassurance, and before long Foch reinforced by subtler means his hold on French's trust.

A firm confidence would soon be needed—and all the more because this initial confidence was built on a false foundation. While the successive attempts to overlap and envelop the enemy's western flank were pursuing their fruitless course a new cloud was gathering in the north, soon to overshadow the so-called "Race to the Sea."

Before and since the Battle of the Marne, Antwerp had been galling the enemy's flank and the nerves of the enemy command. For thither the Belgian Army had withdrawn when, already forsaken by the nature of its allies' plan, it was cut off by the German tide. Its presence at Antwerp, and sorties therefrom, had drawn off German forces from the critical battlefield of the Marne. Hence Falkenhayn, who took Moltke's place after the defeat, determined to eradicate the menace from Antwerp, and in the last week of September the German forces closed in upon the fortress. Joffre, his horizon narrow as ever, was opposed to the sending of French troops in response to the Belgian appeal. Ignoring the value of a lodgment in the enemy's rear, threatening the German communications, he suggested instead that the Belgian Army should abandon Antwerp and fall back to join up with the slow, the all too slow, prolongation of his own left wing. Joffre's reluctance to send troops to Belgium acted as a brake on British action; but through the renewed insistence of Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, a small force of marines and naval volunteers was belatedly sent to Antwerp, while a newly formed 7th division of Regulars, together with a Cavalry Division, was landed at Ostend and Zeebrugge for an overland move to raise the siege. The meagre reinforcement delayed, but could not prevent, the capitulation of Antwerp. And the overland relieving force, under Rawlinson, was too late to do more than cover the escape of the Belgian Army down the Flanders coast.

Yet, in the light of history, it is clear that this slight effort applied a brake to the Germans' advance down the coast which just cost them success in their second attempt to gain a decision

on the Western Front. For the capture of Antwerp had been the preliminary to a greater move. Four days after its fall, Falkenhayn drew up the plan for a strategic trap in which to catch Joffre's next outflanking manoeuvre—obviously to be expected. One army, the *Sixth*, composed of troops transferred from Lorraine, was to hold the Allied offensive in check, while another, the *Fourth*, composed of the Antwerp besiegers and four newly raised army corps, would sweep down the coast and crush the flank of the attacking Allies. Into this trap Foch was now hastening to lead both his own men and his allies through an excess both of confidence and of the offensive spirit.

On October 10th, when the fall of Antwerp was certain, Foch wrote to Joffre: "I consider our situation very satisfactory. Castelnau is not budging, nor, barring some incidents, are his Territorials. Maud'huy is attacking around Arras. His success is slow but continued. . . . The cavalry has not yet sufficient audacity. I will return to Romilly whenever you desire, but I think I am needed here. . . ." And then in a vital postscript he added: "If you approve and if Sir John French agrees, I propose to advance our left (Tenth Army) by Lille to the Scheldt at Tournai or at Orchies, the British Army moving in the direction of Lille and to the north of that town, and forming line from Tournai through Courtrai. In this way all the French, British and Belgian detachments would be united on the left banks of either the Scheldt or the Lys. After that we can see."

To use an apt slang phrase, they would have seen stars. If this move had been carried out as Foch wished, and Falkenhayn equally, it would have laid open the Allied flank to a deadly blow. While the armies were marching east the Germans would have been sweeping south across their rear.

After he had written this letter to Joffre, Foch went to see French. According to Wilson's diary: "Foch turned up and simply said what he wanted done and when." He found French agreeable, and it was arranged between them that the scythe-like eastward swing should be made on the 13th, when the British II and III Corps were expected to be on the scene. French would have preferred to wait until the I Corps also had arrived, and

his whole army was concentrated, but he deferred to Foch's urgency.

It is fair to mention that on the 13th, after this offensive had opened unpromisingly, Foch expressed a doubt to Joffre whether it would be decisive in itself without a coincident break-through in the centre. But Foch in no way relaxed his zeal for the offensive. He told Joffre in his letter : " The marshal [French] wishes at all costs to go to Brussels. I shall not hold him back. I shall help him to the best of my powers."

What a contrast between intention and achievement ! When the British II Corps began to move forward on the 12th, it found that Maud'huy's left had just fallen back, and although it made some progress itself until the German cavalry opposing it were relieved by two infantry divisions, it did not even reach La Bassée, far less Lille. The III Corps and Allenby's Cavalry Corps, coming up on its northern flank, fared no better, and the result was merely to prolong the line of deadlock as far as Messines, just south of Ypres. Thus, by October 20th, French transferred his hopes to a new enveloping manœuvre by Haig's I Corps, then arriving at Ypres. But the Germans anticipated him with a heavier stroke.

In the meantime Foch had found his other ally less sympathetic to his dream-offensive. In accordance with Joffre's plan, Foch sought to induce the Belgians to form the tip of his scythe. King Albert, with more caution, or more realism, declined to abandon the coastal district for an advance inland that he considered rash. In this view he was certainly clairvoyant.

Faced with this reluctance, and also with a report that the Belgians might abandon the line of the Yser, Foch hastened to pay them a personal visit. On the 16th he drove to Dunkirk, where he met Monsieur de Brocqueville, the Prime Minister. Foch is said to have declared to him : " The future of Belgium is at stake at this moment : you must hold on whatever the cost. If you go back, it is erased from the map of Europe. We must see the King, to induce him to continue the struggle. Will you come with me and help me in my task ?" The declaration was characteristic, if perhaps superfluous, for Brocqueville's views were similar.

Preceded by Brocqueville, Foch then drove to Furnes, along roads filled with an unceasing stream of refugees. Furnes itself was packed with troops, many of them showing the exhaustion of the hard retreat from Antwerp. Foch found the King and the headquarters of his army established in the town hall. Once more Foch indulged in a dramatic appeal. If his account of it be correct, he boldly said : " Sir, if you fall back you lose Belgium and perhaps will never regain it. Give orders that your army stands fast. You are its chief, it will listen to you. Tell your soldiers to cling on desperately to the soil of their country, to dig themselves in, to cover themselves with barbed wire. Hold on for a few days and I will answer for everything."

But on the previous day the King himself had issued an order to his army which declared : " The line of the Yser forms our last line of defence in Belgium, and its maintenance is necessary for the development of the general plan of operations. This line will therefore be held at all costs." In the light of this order it is improbable that Foch's influence was as decisive in preventing a Belgian retreat as he himself came to believe. The King had abundantly proved his resolution, not only in face of the German ultimatum, but after his country had been overrun, when many of his subjects felt they had done enough for honour. To hold on now to the last strip of his country was a natural instinct, having committed his people so deeply. It was equally natural, after such an ordeal, that pessimism should have been manifest at the Belgian headquarters, and there is little doubt that some of the staff were questioning the wisdom of a stand on the Yser. Why should they feel otherwise in view of the neglect of their allies to support them hitherto ?

Because of this feeling, Foch's assurance may well have been a tonic, and a help to the King in counteracting the depression—and was welcome as such. The fact that the King took no offence at Foch's far from tactful phrasing is in itself indirect evidence that he was sympathetic to Foch's sentiments. After the war Foch remarked, in recounting the incident : " I expressed my views frankly and somewhat crisply—in grave circumstances I never mince matters. My royal interlocutor has borne me no malice.

He is far too noble to stoop to that. On several later occasions he has reminded me of the scene. 'You were perfectly right,' he said, 'to speak as you did. It was the best way, in fact the only way of making your views felt. The situation might not have been saved otherwise.' " It was only in 1926, when Foch, in an interview, claimed to have prevented him from ordering a retreat, that King Albert made a dignified protest against the inaccuracy of such an assumption.

The French accounts of this interview dwell entirely on the question of resistance. It is only from Belgian sources that we learn of Foch's renewed effort to gain the King's co-operation in the eastward Lille manœuvre. Here "his eloquence" made no impression. But the fact that this persuasion was attempted gives a new significance to the words with which, if M. Bourget's account be correct, he concluded the interview: "At the moment when we are setting out on the conquest of Belgium, people will not understand why the Belgian Army is not figuring alongside us. For myself, a soldier of the Republic, I can assure your Majesty that our cause is just and holy and that Providence will give us the victory." Foch was referring not to the distant but to the immediate future. The words would seem to betray chagrin that the Belgians would not join in his offensive.

But, perhaps through his early training, he was as much a realist in human relations as he was the reverse in strategic views. In this readiness to forgo the ideal for the practicable lay the secret of his success as a co-ordinator. And it is also just to point out evidence that even his military outlook had been sobered by the news that the German forces from Antwerp had just entered Ostend and Thourout, an advance which brought them menacingly close to the line of the Yser. That evening Foch wrote to Admiral Ronarc'h, commanding a brigade of French marines that he had moved up to the Yser: "Under the present circumstances, any idea of manœuvring is out of the question, and your tactics must be confined purely and simply to resisting on your actual positions. . . . You should find no difficulty in holding your ground."

Foch then drove back to Doullens, seventy-five miles away,

and on arrival wrote a report to Joffre of the day's doings. He told Joffre that he had asked the British "to advance Rawlinson's corps from Ypres in the direction of Roulers, in order to divert the German attack from the Belgian Army," which "is established along the line of the Yser. It has been ordered to re-organise there, and to defend itself with the utmost energy. The King and the Prime Minister seem determined to adopt these tactics and to see that they are carried out." The absence of any suggestion that he had overridden a reluctant King is noteworthy. "The British Army is continuing its advance on Courtrai."

Next morning, the 17th, Foch drove to Maud'huy's headquarters at Saint-Pol, where he met Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Reading, who were paying a visit to the front. Foch made a good impression on the future British Prime Minister, not merely by his confidence, but by his apparent realism. For Foch, his thoughts evidently on the Yser, declared: "We are going to dig trenches; they want to break through. They shall not break through." Later in the war, according to Foch, Lloyd George "often said" to him: "You are the man of the Saint-Pol programme," in tribute to his early grasp of the reality of trench-warfare conditions. Thus it is interesting, and somewhat ironical, to note that Foch went straight on from this interview to meet Sir John French at Anvin in the afternoon, and to press him to renew his offensive next day.

As we have already noted, the progress was negligible. That same day the Germans made contact with the Yser line. On the 19th their attack developed in strength. Up till now the six weak Belgian divisions had been distributed along the whole line of the Yser from the sea almost to Ypres. But, just in time, two French Territorial Divisions, covered by Mitry's Cavalry Corps, took over the right half of the line, as far as Dixmude, reinforcing Ronarc'h's brigade and linking up with Rawlinson's force at Ypres.

Against the Belgian sector were marching Beseler's three divisions from Antwerp. Screened by these until the last moment, a greater force was converging against the Dixmude-Ypres

sector. It comprised four newly raised army corps (eight divisions) which were formed of volunteers—the flower of Germany's youth—although built up on a frame of trained troops.

Foch, apparently, still believed that his eastward manœuvre could upset the impending German stroke, and even cut the German forces in two. In any case he regarded attack as the best means of defence. If he himself now sought to take the offensive primarily as a counter to the German effort, he took care to conceal this view from French and to nourish the British Commander's uncertain spirit with the idea that an offensive success was within reach. French was a human weathercock. He had already suffered one reaction after the failure of his initial advance eastward; it had led him to discuss with Wilson the idea of constructing a huge entrenched camp around Boulogne. Wilson had promptly warned Foch, who, with tactful guile, had written to French, saying that, while he quite agreed with the idea of constructing an entrenched line behind the front as an insurance, Boulogne seemed too far back. He suggested instead a line along the Bethune-St. Omer canal, and promised to help in its development.

By the 19th French's mind seems to have been swung forward to eastward again by Foch's gusts of optimism. Although Rawlinson's attempt that day to advance eastward on Menin had been abortive, French ordered Haig's Corps to advance north-eastward "with the object of capturing Bruges," saying that "the enemy's strength on the front Menin-Ostend is estimated at about a corps and no more." Yet his own intelligence officers estimated, and underestimated, the enemy's strength as being three and a half corps. As one of these officers later explained: "The old man only believed what he wished to believe." Foch's power of "suggestion" for the moment dominated French's mind. For two more days French persisted in the belief that he was attacking, while, in fact, his troops were barely holding their ground.

For his offensive was still-born, as it clashed with the opening of the German offensive against Ypres and a simultaneous renewal of the German offensive against the southern part of the British line. Everywhere the British were thrown on the de-

fensive, and in several places lost ground. But French that evening renewed his attack orders to Haig, apparently with the idea that his left wing would still find the enemy's open flank. So on the 21st Haig's Corps duly tried to advance past Rawlinson's flank, only to be first held up and then menaced on its left. The troops dug in where they stood, and, as their left had been swung back, the Ypres salient of now immortal memory was formed.

That same day Joffre, visiting Flanders, had come to see French, and, as an encouragement to fresh offensive efforts, had told him that the French detachment was being increased by the dispatch of the IX Corps. (As the 42nd Division was just arriving to reinforce the Belgian sector, Foch would thus have three of his old divisions of the Marne again under his control.) The weathercock, however, was now veering—back to a former direction.

According to Wilson: "Sir John asked for facilities to make a great entrenched camp at Boulogne to take the whole Expeditionary Force. Joffre's face instantly became quite square, and he replied that such a thing could not be allowed for a moment." (We learn from Poincaré that Joffre on his return complained "rather bitterly about French," suggested trying to have him replaced by Wilson, and made the amazing assertion that French "could have taken Lille" that day "without striking a blow.") Until, however, the French reinforcements arrived, the British Commander was unwilling to give any more offensive order than that "Action against enemy will be continued tomorrow on general line now held." It was a euphemistic way of prescribing the defensive!

Foch still persisted in the offensive idea. Although the enemy's strength was now unmistakable, he ordered his own troops—now forming the embryo of d'Urbal's Eighth Army—to make a general offensive on the 23rd in the three widely spread directions of Roulers, Thourout, and Ghisteltes. At the same time he asked the Belgians and British to take part, the latter again to swing east. If they had done so they would have laid open their flank. Happily the enemy gave them no chance of trying.

Foch's request did not reach British General Headquarters

until a few hours before the French attack was supposed to start. It was also complicated by the receipt of a request from d'Urbal that the British would attack in a different direction, and by d'Urbal's instructions to his own right wing to advance on a line which would take it through the British front. The official history remarks, with moderation, that such proposals "could not be taken seriously." On hearing of them Haig telegraphed to G.H.Q. that "there must be some misapprehension of the situation, that there was no time for concerted action, and every chance of confusion." But his anxiety was needless. The leading French troops did not appear until the afternoon. The enemy's fire at once stopped their attempt to advance, but they were a welcome reinforcement to the line of defence. Their arrival made the two sides approximately equal in strength, numerically, from Ypres to the sea.

Next day, the 24th, the French IX Corps was ordered "to continue to advance." Foch, who was just moving his headquarters up to Cassel, telegraphed direct to the corps commander, Dubois, "All the units of the IX Corps are detrained," which was anticipation, not fact. "Make your dispositions that all these units are employed today, and that the action receives a new impulse. There must be decision and activity." The result at least gave an air of vindication to Foch's theory, for Dubois's men advanced over half a mile before they were finally held up, while the British, fighting defensively, lost some ground. But the German records suggest that in the proportion of loss inflicted the defensive was the more profitable, and that by the night of the 24th the new German corps had blunted their fighting edge.

Realising that their effort was spent, the German *Fourth Army* Commander pinned his hopes to a continued effort against the Yser sector, "where a decision seemed imminent." This, if achieved, would open the path to Dunkirk and Calais.

Under cover of darkness the Germans had gained a footing across the Yser near Tervaete on the night of the 22nd. Counter-attacks failed to dislodge them, all the Belgian reserves were used up, and the French 42nd Division, which would have been invaluable for the purpose, had unfortunately been committed to

a vain offensive in the coastal corridor near Nieuport. By the 24th the Germans had brought the infantry of two and a half divisions across the Yser to expand this foothold, and the Belgian centre gave way under the strain. Fortunately it managed to rally on the embankment of the Dixmude-Nieuport railway, whither the 42nd Division was switched, too late for effective counter-attack, but in time to stiffen the resistance. Fortunately, also, Ronarc'h's marines had splendidly withstood repeated German assaults on the key-point of Dixmude.

But the situation was still critical, and next day King Albert sanctioned the attempt to create a water-barrier by opening the locks at Nieuport so as to flood all the country between the Yser and the railway embankment. While the king delayed as long as possible this sacrifice of his soil to the sea, it would also appear that some of the French generals were opposed to a step that would block their own offensive. How far Foch shared their attitude is disputed. He had certainly postponed the Dunkirk inundations; but these were across the Belgians' rear, and aroused their objections. When they found a way of flooding their front, Foch made no objection.

The railway embankment was held, without suffering much pressure, until at high tide on the evening of the 28th the Belgian engineers succeeded in opening one of the locks at Nieuport and letting in the sea. If it crept in slowly, each day brought a fresh reinforcement to the flood, until "it seemed to the Germans as if the whole country had sunk with them, and behind them." With the impetus of desperation they renewed their attack and breached the embankment-line of defence at Ramscapelle. But the rising flood came to the rescue, and during the night the Germans began to retire across the Yser to escape being cut off.

It is interesting to hear Foch's own recital of his action when the Belgian command told him on the telephone of the original emergency. "I said: 'Hold the railway line.' I did not know the ground, but it was either an embankment or a cutting. In any case, it was a line which would be well marked on the map, and it might provide some cover. Everybody can see and recognise it. They must stop and hold on there, that is simple! . . .

It was an embankment, and we dug in on one side. Then the floods came, and stopped on the other side. After that we had some duck-shooting ! Yes, the Boches were just like ducks. . . ."

The crisis on the Yser had not been the only one, for the German *Sixth Army* had launched its offensive against the British right (II and III Corps) along a line stretching from La Bassée in the south almost to Messines. The II Corps situation seemed so grave on the 25th that, as Wilson recorded, "At midnight Smith-Dorrien came in to report that he was afraid his corps might go during the night. Sir John rather short with him, and I think fails to realise what it would mean." But although Neuve Chapelle was lost, further attacks were beaten off and the German offensive died away before the end of the month.

The crises on the Yser and at La Bassée were the prelude to a greater crisis at Ypres. This, again, followed on a fresh attempt by the Allies to take the offensive, which weakened them for the subsequent defensive struggle.

No sooner had the first crisis at Ypres passed than Foch resumed his offensive—in his own mind he had never discontinued it. That he had again infused French with his own assurance is clear from the telegram which French had sent to Kitchener : "The enemy are vigorously playing their last card." In the night of the 24th French wired again, suggesting that the battle was "practically won."

But on the 25th the Allied offensive made practically no progress against newly wired German defences. On the 26th Dubois and Haig continued the attack, but only advanced a few hundred yards. In contrast, the sharp southern corner of the salient, where Rawlinson's men (the 7th Division) stood, was smashed in by a German attack, and for a time converted into an equally sharp re-entrant. Luckily the assailants did not follow up their success. They were preparing and screening a greater stroke.

A new German army under Fabeck was being brought up, to be inserted like a wedge on the south side of the Ypres salient, between the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies*. This wedge was made up of six divisions, heavily buttressed with artillery. Its entry into the battle on the 29th would give the Germans a two to one

superiority in numbers. With unforeseeing irony, French had just wired to Kitchener that they were "quite incapable of making any strong and sustained attack."

For two days more the Allied offensive was continued without effect, although Dubois had been reinforced by a third division. Faced with a strong line, and themselves provided with little ammunition, the fighting commanders were wise enough to water down the orders received from behind. And although on the night of the 28th these orders again prescribed the offensive, the troops in front suspected the coming storm.

It broke, over the British front, at half-past five next morning. It was now the Germans' turn to leave the shelter of their trenches and offer themselves as targets. An infantry trained to fire "fifteen rounds rapid" in the minute with the rifle was thus enabled to prove its hitting power, and to produce a leaden counter-storm that obscured its lack of machine-guns so well that its German assailants thought it had "quantities"; they declared that "over every bush, hedge, and fragment of wall floated a thin film of smoke, betraying a machine-gun rattling out bullets." Thus at the end of the day the British front was intact, save at one point—Gheluvelt cross-roads. But Haig, under whom all three divisions had now been placed, had no reserve left intact.

During the day French had been to Cassel for another injection of Fochian serum. Foch told French that he was satisfied with "the advance" of his own troops between Ypres and the sea, but admitted that he was "far from well informed as to their doings." French on his return ordered the British advance to be continued! He also wired to Kitchener that "if the success can be followed up, it will lead to a decisive result." Haig, with the greater realism that came from a closer view, told his troops to entrench, and added that he would postpone "orders as to the resumption of the offensive" until he saw what the situation was in the morning.

The enemy command at the same time were issuing an Order of the Day which said: "The break-through will be of decisive importance. We must and will therefore conquer, settle for ever

the centuries-long struggle, end the war, and strike the decisive blow against our most detested enemy. We will finish with the British, Indians, Canadians, Moroccans, and other trash, feeble adversaries who surrender in mass if they are attacked with vigour."

The attack was aimed at the Zandvoorde and Messines Ridges, to break through the southern hinge of the salient with the object of reaching the Kemmel heights. Thus the main weight fell on the 7th Division and on the thin chain of three dismounted cavalry divisions which linked Haig's force with the III Corps.

A bad break was made in the left of the cavalry line, where the Life Guards stood, and the enemy gained Zandvoorde ridge, thus compelling the right of the 7th Division to fall back. Another break followed in the cavalry centre near Hollebeke, and led to a deeper retirement. But the war-experienced assailants did not show the reckless courage of the volunteers who had been repulsed earlier, and their caution in following up their success enabled Haig and Allenby to "putty up" the gaps. Haig also made an appeal to Dubois, who so generously responded as to send his own small reserve to strengthen the line south of Ypres, where it certainly did more good than in supporting an imaginary offensive on the north.

Foch, back on the hill of Cassel, had little and late idea of what had happened. "Towards the end of the afternoon a first report of these events" was brought to him, but, as he says, "it was impossible for me to estimate their full significance." About 10 p.m. one of his staff came back with word that "there was certainly a gap in the British cavalry front, which they could not fill for want of men. If this breach was not quickly closed, the road to Ypres would be open." Foch at once telephoned to the British G.H.Q. at Saint-Omer to ask for fuller news, but was told that "nothing more definite was known."

So, just before midnight, Foch himself set off for St. Omer. On arrival, he "had Sir John French awakened," and seems to have found a mental depression developing. French declared: "We are all in for it." To which Foch replied: "We shall see. In the meantime, hammer away, keep on hammering, and you

will get there. It's surprising the results you attain in this way." To counteract the depression, and to fill the physical gap, he promised that if French would hold on he would send him eight battalions of the 32nd Division, which was just arriving in the French sector. Foch did not get back to Cassel until about 2 a.m. Summarising his action up to this moment, he said, pointing to the map: "I've stuck a wafer there and there; then, at Hollebeke, the English broken through, the Boches passing through—a wafer here."

A few hours later, after daybreak, the worst crisis of the whole struggle arose. How strange that it should have come on October 31st, the date most fateful in Foch's early career. The Kaiser himself arrived to preside over its destinies from a seat in the gallery.

The main attack was once more aimed, with odds of five to one, at the sagging line of Allenby's cavalry. But this line, now reinforced by a few battalions of British infantry and Dubois's timely contribution, stood firm until the attacks died away at nightfall. Half of Foch's promised contribution arrived in time to take over part of the line in the evening.

The crisis of the battle occurred further north—at Gheluvelt on the Ypres-Menin road. Lying on a forward spur of the low ridge—more truly, the undulation—that covers Ypres, Gheluvelt was the last point retained in British hands from which the eyes of ground observers could overlook the enemy's line. Under increasing pressure the line of the 1st Division caved in, and shortly before noon Gheluvelt was lost. The divisional commander, Lomax, on hearing the news, rode back to the headquarters he shared with Monro of the 2nd Division, and laconically remarked: "My line is broken." Half an hour later a shell burst in the room where they were holding a conference with their staffs. Lomax and several others were killed. Only one of those present was unhurt. Control was temporarily disorganised.

Haig meantime had left his headquarters at the White Château and ridden forward up the Menin road "at a slow trot with part of his staff behind him as at an inspection." If the sight of him brought reassurance to the stragglers and wounded who were

trickling down the road, the sight of them and the nearer fall of the enemy shells told its significant tale to him. On his return he heard definite news of the break in the line. The menace of disaster drove him to a grave decision. He issued orders for his troops to fall back to a rearward line just covering Ypres, and to hold it to the last, if they could not hold on where they were.

At 2 p.m. Sir John French appeared at Haig's headquarters, where the outlook then seemed at its blackest. He had scarcely need to be told of the critical situation, for he could feel it in the atmosphere. Every reserve had been used and he himself had no reinforcements to offer. White with anxiety, he hurried off on foot to regain his car and go in search of Foch to ask for help. Hardly had he left than an officer galloped madly up to the White Château with news that an aptly gauged counter-attack by one battalion (the 2nd Worcestershires) had tumbled the Germans out of Gheluvelt. Its moral effect had been much greater, acting as extinguisher to the enemy's flickering will to attack.

Haig's aide-de-camp dashed after French with the news, and caught him just as he had reached his car. How far the news was clear, and how far French understood its significance, is uncertain. He drove off at breakneck pace on the way to Cassel. But as his car slowed down in passing through Vlamertinghe a French staff officer recognised him and told him that Foch was there, conferring with d'Urbal and Dubois in the town hall. French went thither to catch Foch. In making his appeal for aid he painted a black picture of the situation and the state of Haig's corps. The reality was certainly dark, but perhaps the picture seemed blacker because Foch and French had so long persisted in seeing it brightly coloured. French naturally told Foch of Haig's orders for a withdrawal, and it was equally natural for Foch to regard any limited withdrawal as tantamount to disaster. Foch replied, if his memory of the reply was accurate: " Marshal, your lines are pierced. You have no troops available. You are finished. Then you must advance. If you retreat voluntarily, you will be swept up like straws in the gale. Loss of Flanders, of Belgium, of Calais. Your army thrown into the sea. The Kaiser wishes to enter Ypres. He shall not enter. I don't wish it."

According to Foch, French replied that if his exhausted troops were asked to continue the battle, "there is nothing left for me to do save to go up and be killed with the I Corps." It is possible that the dramatic note was heightened in interpretation. Whether or not Foch replied, "You must not talk of dying, but of winning," he certainly proposed to apply his usual remedy. "I'll attack to right and left." He promised that at daybreak six battalions of the 32nd division—actually two less than he had promised at midnight—should counter-attack on the right flank of the I Corps, while part of Dubois's corps counter-attacked on its left.

He then sat down and wrote out an "informal scrawl," "as much to aid in fixing my own ideas as to furnish them in definite and precise form," to French. It read thus: "It is absolutely essential that *no retirement is made*, and to that end to dig in wherever you happen to be. This does not prevent you from organising a rear position which should join up, at Zonnebeke, with our IX Corps. But any movement made to the rear by a considerable body of troops will lead to an enemy push and to certain disorder among the retiring troops. This must absolutely be prevented. . . ." He handed this epistle to French with the words: "There, if I were in your shoes, those are the orders I'd send to Haig."

Of Foch's influence on French there is little question. It is reflected in the note which French now despatched to Haig along with Foch's memorandum: "It is of the *utmost importance* to hold the ground you are on now. It is useless for me to say this, because I know you will do it if it is humanly possible. I will see if it is possible to send you any more support myself when I reach headquarters. I will then finally arrange with Foch *what* our future rôle is to be."

But of Foch's practical influence on the battle situation at the time there is no evidence. The Worcestershires' counter-attack had saved it before Foch and French had their talk. And before their notes reached Haig he had settled his new line of resistance. For tactical security he had decided to straighten the front of the 1st Division by withdrawing to a line just behind Gheluvelt,

while the 2nd Division was to stand on its existing line. And as the enemy pressure had ceased, what Foch said merely confirmed what had already happened. We may admire the spirit that inspired it, but we cannot regard it as materially and historically decisive. It is true that French could have given the order for a general retreat, but such an order was improbable for the simple reason that he had left the battle entirely in the charge of Haig.

For the next ten days Haig's line remained without change and unshaken, save for a minor withdrawal of his right on the 5th to conform to a recoil of the French troops on his right.

On November 1st the main German effort was again made on the flank of the salient, against its southern hinge. This time they tried an assault under cover of darkness, as early as 1 a.m., and the experiment was repaid by the capture of the Messines Ridge. The inward bulge of Allenby's line was deepened by over a mile. But the arrival of the French 32nd Division soon after daybreak relieved the strain, although its counter-attack could not redeem the lost ground. If the other French "attack," on Haig's left, also made no measurable progress, its appearance likewise tended to discourage the enemy from pressing his own attack.

For Foch, November 1st was a day of activity, perhaps the most fruitful of any during the battle. And this time the effect was not solely in the spiritual sphere. On the previous day Foch had written from Cassel: "Today has justified my anticipations. Tomorrow I shall have fresh forces. We shall attack them [the Germans]. Perhaps we shall finish them. Perhaps more time will be required. The President of the Republic arrives tomorrow. I shall be pleased to provide him with a success." As this letter was apparently written before he heard of the Gheluvelt break, it was certainly an anticipation.

The first reaction of the news of the loss of Messines on the 1st was to bring Foch up to Vlamertinghe, whence he sent a message asking Sir John French to come forward to see him. According to him, French showed a fresh access of pessimism. Foch renewed his exhortations against any retirement, and, as more practical encouragement, told French that he was ordering Conneau's Cavalry Corps to come up from the south, while

part of the 39th Division of Foch's old XX Corps had already arrived. Whether Foch overestimated French's pessimism, or whether his own injection caused a change for the better, the one certain fact is that French subsequently wired home that he was much less anxious about the situation. Foch wrote: "The battle continues. It seems to me calmer. More troops are constantly arriving. In a few days we shall be able to renew the attack in full force."

On the 2nd the French attack to reduce the Messines bulge was forestalled by a German attack, causing a French recoil, during which Wytshaete was lost and the bulge somewhat deepened. But most of the French 39th Division and half of the Cavalry Corps arrived to relieve the strain. And the 43rd Division was just detraining. The French now took over the larger part of Allenby's line. Thus they held henceforth two-thirds of the reversed S (S) formed by the Ypres salient and the Messines re-entrant, leaving the weary and intermixed units under Haig's command to maintain the central sector. Worst hit of all was the 7th Division, whose infantry were reduced from 12,300 men to 2,400—a bare fifth of their original strength.

During the next few days Foch pursued his attacks—without progress. While those of November 1st and 2nd by their boldness damped the enemy's will to advance, these later attacks had no such moral effect to compensate their lack of visible progress. For the German command was marking time until, by combing their line elsewhere, they could bring up six more divisions for a renewed effort. In this, the points of their attack were to be successively closed inward like a pair of calipers. Initially, abandoning the attempt to deepen the Messines bulge, they would place the points against the two hinges of the salient.

While this plan was maturing, Foch came to the conclusion that the German assault was spent, and that they were withdrawing troops from Flanders to redeem their defeats in the East. His conclusion coincided with the enemy's first thought and ultimate action, but not with the enemy's meantime decision—to try one more effort at Ypres. Foch also came to realise the futility of expecting an offensive success where his opponents

had failed ; for on November 5th he informed d'Urbal that the Belgian theatre had lost its importance, as the Germans had had time to dig in, and that there was now no chance of obtaining any decisive success there. But he did not put any check on d'Urbal's abortive local attacks. When the Messines Ridge was regained in June, 1917, by Plumer's methodically prepared blow, his men would find the foot of the slopes lined with the skeletons—their dingy whiteness flecked with tatters of red and blue uniform—of those Frenchmen who had gone forward with such vain gallantry at Foch's behest into the fire-ringed valley of death.

The tactical consequence of this self-exhausting impulse is to be traced in the dangerous recoil which came on November 6th at the southern hinge in face of the Germans' renewed pressure—itself a preliminary to their final stroke. At St. Eloi the grey tide came within two miles of Ypres, lapping round the rear of the British, who were holding the nose of the salient. Haig warned his chief that, to avoid being cut off, he would have to fall back to a line through Ypres itself. Foch, however, sent to assure Haig that he would regain the lost ground by an attack next day. At 9.30 a.m. on the 7th he sent a message that the French line had been re-established. But in fact nothing had been done. His men were too dead-beat to respond to orders. And when eventually they were spurred to an offensive effort, it naturally failed, thus failing to remove the menacing wedge that lay embedded in the flank of the salient.

On the 8th Haig went with French to see Foch at Cassel, and found him as exuberantly confident as ever. But it was his indefiniteness rather than his assurance that kept them from fulfilling their intention to fall back to a straighter and safer line. In similar manner, when Wilson was sent by French on successive nights to argue with Foch the wisdom of a withdrawal, the would-be persuasion was frustrated by Foch's jocular reply : "*Double Vay*,* if you come to talk to me about Ypres it is vain—because such a place is not on my map."

* It is of historical note that the British forces were usually referred to by the French staff as "*L'Armée W.*"

So, unable to obtain any satisfaction, and unwilling to leave his allies in the lurch, Haig was fain to hold on as best he could, scraping the human putty off one crack to cement another. Happily, if deceptively, the next two days were comparatively quiet along the British sector. Not so for the French.

For on November 10th the enemy struck heavily against the northern hinge of the salient, and as far as Dixmude. The blow was parried, the French profiting by the natural line of the Yser canal, across which their left retired. Its more significant result was to convince the French command that their own line north of Ypres was the spot selected for the enemy's final effort. And thither were diverted such few reserves as they could spare, at the expense of the already weakened southern hinge.

But this blow against the northern hinge had been intended as simultaneous with one against Gheluvelt and the southern hinge (as far south as the Comines canal), for which a new corps under Plettenberg, Foch's assailant of the Marne, had been brought up. It comprised a division of the Prussian Guard and another picked division. As Plettenberg was not ready, the left-hand blow had been postponed.

On the 11th the attack was launched, in a grey November mist, and prepared by the worst bombardment yet experienced. But at all save two points it was repulsed. One was at the actual hinge, where the wedge was driven in as far as the later famous Hill 60. The French detachment there appealed for help to the French and British Corps on either side, but neither could spare any reserves. The "ever-willing" Dubois, however, once more sent his only reserve, and with its help the line was restored. The other and deeper penetration was made in the British line just north of the Menin road. Here the German 1st *Guard Brigade* broke through the weak front of the British 1st (Guards) Brigade—a strange coincidence of history, even though only the remnants of one Guards' battalion were left in the latter brigade. But the Prussian Guardsmen, bewildered by the woods, failed to exploit their success and were driven back by a flank counter-attack.

Although the blow had been heavier than on October 31st, the

situation had never been so critical, perhaps largely because it had made less impression on the minds of the commanders in rear—where impressions are always worse. And with the failure of this blow on November 11th—date of prophetic symbolism—the crisis at Ypres finally passed. The spasmodic attacks that continued for a few days, chiefly against Dubois's front, were but the fading flickers of a storm that is travelling away. The relief of the I Corps, so long demanded by Haig, and refused by Foch with the word "Impossible," was now carried out, and the French took over for a time the whole salient.

"First Ypres" had been essentially a "soldiers' battle"—a greater Inkerman. In a memorable sentence General Edmonds has epitomised the situation: "The line that stood between the British Empire and ruin was composed of tired, haggard and unshaven men, unwashed, plastered with mud, many in little more than rags." Its only divergence from accuracy lies in its one deviation from stark simplicity. The British Empire has shown a capacity for survival, even when its military expeditions have actually been driven back to their ships, and when its enemy has been in possession of the Channel ports. And it is by no means sure that, if the Expeditionary Force had been defeated at Ypres, the Germans were capable of following so closely on its heels as to bring disaster. In the light of the succeeding years there is, indeed, reason for regret that Haig did not fulfil his idea of withdrawing to the straighter and stronger line along the canal through Ypres. It would have saved cost and simplified defence. And its hindrance to later attempts at the offensive in Flanders, an impossible country for the offensive, might have been an additional advantage.

The danger at "First Ypres" was certainly aggravated by the failure of Foch, French, and d'Urbal to realise this impossibility. Herein lay their most material influence on the battle. For the real handling of the battle was left in the hands of Haig and Dubois. Even they, for want of reserves, could do little more than cement the crumbling parts of the defence by judicious thinning of other parts of an ominously thin front. Perhaps to Dubois, for the way he took, not once alone, the calculated risk of part-

ing with his own reserves, is due the highest credit of command earned in the defensive battle.

Foch undoubtedly had a moral influence on the battle, no less by his obstinate refusal to listen to reason than by the unconquerable strength of his will. This never wilted. Detach it from the actual ebb and flow of the battle-line, and we can admire it unreservedly. It made an impression on all who came in contact with it. But one is not able to detect any point at which it touched the men in the battle-line. And where it touched the fighting commanders the effect seems to have become a source more of exasperation than exaltation.

The one sure point where Foch's will fortified another will was at the back of the front—at the allied general headquarters. While some of the claims made for its influence on the Belgian command may be discounted, especially in regard to King Albert, they cannot be disregarded. On Sir John French the influence is more measurable, but here the measure of its effect is inevitably as infinitesimal as Sir John French's influence on the battle.

We may perhaps regard this historical reduction as retribution for Foch's share in maintaining Sir John French in command. This forms a not insignificant episode of the battle behind the front. After the interview with French at Vlamertinghe on November 1st, Foch hurried away to attend a conference at Dunkirk. Thither Kitchener had come to meet Poincaré and Joffre. In imagined privacy Kitchener mooted his intention of recalling Sir John French and replacing him by Sir Ian Hamilton. Joffre and Foch had thought of asking that French should be replaced by Wilson, but they were not favourable to a change for the unknown, which might weaken their existing influence over the British command. On November 5th, Foch told Wilson privately of Kitchener's proposal, and suggested that French himself ought to be told. Next day, according to Wilson's diary : " Sir John and I went to Cassel at 3 p.m., when Sir John thanked Foch personally and in the warmest terms for his comradeship and loyalty. They shook hands on it . . . and the two parted great friends." Through this breach of confidence, French and his staff were able to take steps both at home and in France to

nullify the proposal. Some member of his staff, there is little doubt who, took the shrewd course of informing Joffre, quite untruthfully, that Sir Ian Hamilton spoke the French language even worse than Sir John French. It is needless to emphasise the effect of this hint at G.Q.G., where the inter-allied situation in Flanders was already compared, with caustic humour, to the "Towel of Babel."

Foch's disclosure naturally strengthened his influence over French and assuaged the resentment which French had been nursing since his rather summary treatment on October 31st. It is clear that Foch gauged French's character aptly, if also that admiration for it was not his motive in combating French's recall. For when Huguet earlier told Foch that French was aggrieved with him, he jocularly replied: "Bah! It is of no importance; you have only to tell him that he has just saved England; that will put him in a good humour again!" When Huguet duly conveyed the core of this message to French, he received the gratified if also self-satisfied answer: "But, my dear fellow, I know it only too well. I knew it from the beginning."

Chapter XI

DEADLOCK

WITH the repulse of the German attempt to break through at Ypres the trench barrier was consolidated from the Swiss frontier to the English Channel. Modern defence had sealed its triumph over attack, and stalemate ensued. The military history of the Franco-British alliance was henceforth to be a story of the attempt to break this deadlock, either by forcing the barrier or by haphazardly finding a way round it.

On the Eastern front also the waters of conflict had become still after a dramatic ebb and flow. At the outset, Russia had abandoned her tradition of waiting strategy under the influence of her French ally, and had thrown her unready armies into an offensive gamble in which her stake was doubled. Yielding to her own desires, she launched a converging blow against Austria and, through the fortune of catching Conrad in course of a too reckless offensive of his own, swept the disordered Austrian armies out of Galicia. The profit, however, had already suffered a debit.

Yielding to French urgency, Russia had also launched two armies into East Prussia. The threat at least drew off four enemy divisions from the invasion of France. But the danger had been dispersed before these arrived. A young staff officer, Hoffmann, taking the cards from his commander's trembling hand, had reshuffled them ready for his new commander, Hindenburg, to trump the Russian lead. Even though the hand was played with less skill and coolness, it sufficed to win the game. By the victory of Tannenberg one of the Russian armies was almost annihilated while isolated, both were swept out of East Prussia, and the name of Hindenburg became a synonym for success.

Behind him was at once discerned the shadow of his Chief of Staff, Ludendorff, and as further successes followed that shadow would rise above his own figure. But Hoffmann would continue to stand in the shadow behind both, and it was only when Ludendorff left the Eastern Front for the Supreme Command two years later that he parted from his "ghost."

After Tannenberg the next task of this military trinity was to go to Austria's rescue, and in October the Russians were pushed back towards Warsaw. Before it was reached the scales were turned again by the growing weight of Russia's mobilised strength. A huge phalanx of seven armies began a ponderous advance through Poland towards Silesia. Unable to hear the creaking of the machine, the French and British peoples gleefully spoke of the "Russian steam-roller." It would have been a more apt simile to liken the Russian masses to "dumb, driven cattle." They were soon driven back, never again to approach German soil. After a swift lateral move by rail to the northern flank, a thrust up the Vistula against a joint of the Russian phalanx was delivered on November 11th—the day of the final crisis at Ypres. The Russians, narrowly escaping another Tannenberg, were forced to evacuate Western Poland, and fall back to winter trench-lines covering Warsaw. Thus the Eastern Front, like the Western, froze into immobility. But the crust was less firm, and the Russians had drained their stock of munitions to an extent that their poorly industrialised country could not make good.

The war at sea had been unmarked by any tidal changes of fortune. It had begun and continued with a deadlock, if a deadlock definitely favourable to Britain and her allies. Its fundamental cause lay in the inherent difficulties of bringing an unwilling naval enemy to battle, a difficulty that had grown as the development of the mine and the submarine reproduced at sea the predominance of the defensive over the offensive that on land was created by the machine-gun. The immediate cause of the deadlock was due to the decision for indecision of the German Naval Command. Realising the inferiority of their surface fleet, and believing that their enemy would still pursue the Nelsonian tradition of seeking battle, they adopted the Fabian strategy of

refusing battle until, by mine and submarine warfare, they had weakened the British fleet.

But this plan was nullified by the British action in substituting distant surveillance of their enemy's ports for a close blockade, thus offering few opportunities for the enemy to take toll of their battleships. The British Admiralty, moreover, subordinated the desire of a new Trafalgar to the sure aim of maintaining control of the ocean routes. Her strategy thus baffled, and her own merchant ships swept off the oceans, Germany resorted early in 1915 to a submarine attack on her enemy's sea-borne supplies. This first submarine campaign was a failure for Germany but an aid to Britain, providing her with a lever whereby she could loosen the restrictions which the 1909 "Declaration of London" had placed on her power of surface blockade. Thereby she was able to tighten her grip on Germany's neutral sources of supply. In 1917 the economic pressure would be answered by Germany's second submarine campaign, which, in turn, by bringing the United States into the war, would enable the anti-German surface blockade to be developed into a stranglehold. But in 1914 the artificial restrictions on economic pressure, its inherent gradualness, and the comparative abundance of resources, combined to cloak its tremendous power from the eyes of the Continental strategists. Their aim was a victorious decision on land; their problem, how to dissolve the trench-bound fronts.

The reaction to the deadlock in the various countries took diverse forms. Even its reality was varyingly appreciated. With the Germanic Powers the opinion of Falkenhayn was the decisive factor. And the impression derived not merely from his critics, but from his own account, is that neither the opinion nor the direction was clear. At first Falkenhayn contemplated a renewed effort to break through in the West. Reluctantly dissuaded from this, he did not undertake an offensive against Russia as a conscious strategy, but rather drifted into it under the compulsion of events. It was the threatening situation of the Austro-Hungarian front which constrained him to send reinforcements thither, and, having done so, he adopted the plan of a limited offensive as the best way of redeeming his liabilities. Even so, he

doled out reserves reluctantly and meagrely, enough to secure a delusive success, but never in the quantity or the time for decisive victory.

What was more creditable to his foresight, he realised that a long war was now inevitable, and sought to develop Germany's resources for such a contest of endurance. The supply of munitions and of the raw material for their manufacture was tackled so energetically and comprehensively that an ample flow was ensured from the spring of 1915 onwards—a time when the British people were only awakening to the problem.

The autumn of 1914 was also signalised by the entry of Turkey into the war on Germany's side, a diplomatic success that was prepared by assiduous courting, expedited by Turkish fear of Russia, and consummated by military events. It was a success that Falkenhayn counted as of "decisive importance"—first, because it placed a barrier across the channel of munition supply to Russia, and, secondly, as a distraction to the military strength of Britain and Russia.

In Britain, the effect of "First Ypres" was to give the people some share in Kitchener's vision. The little professional army in sacrificing itself became the advanced guard of the nation. Whereas the Marne and its mirage of victory had obscured the impression of the frontier battles, Ypres brought home to the nation the scale of the struggle and its demands on man-power, if its material needs were not yet realised. By the end of 1914 nearly a million men had answered Kitchener's call. Curiously, the civilian people in England caught the long-range rays of Kitchener's vision earlier than the chiefs of the army in France. Henry Wilson remarked that Kitchener's "ridiculous and preposterous army of twenty-five corps is the laughing-stock of every soldier in Europe . . . under no circumstances could these mobs take the field for two years. Then what is the use of them?" For he was blinded by the radiance of the G.Q.G. vision which made the Rhine appear only a few steps distant.

Galliéni was expressing doubts whether it was possible to pierce the trench barrier; Franchet d'Esperey was already suggesting an alternative move in the Near East. But those who

held the power of decision had lost none of their confidence after the experience of Ypres. Was it a comparative remoteness from the battle-line which generated this atmosphere of unreality?

On November 15th, the day of the Prussian Guard attack, Wilson "went out to see Foch at 11 a.m. . . . Long strategical talk, in which we agreed that Germany has still one chance, and one only, namely to shorten her front on this frontier sufficiently to allow her to transfer twenty to thirty corps to Russia, thrash the Russians, and then come back to us. To do this she must retire to the line Liège-Metz, or possibly even to the Rhine. Any middle course would be fatal to her."

This argument was reflected in the report which Foch made to Joffre on the 19th. He began with the assumption, a true one, that "the German plan had failed," and added, less truly, "Better still, we ourselves are in perfect condition, both morally and materially, for attacking them." It would seem an example of introspection rather than of observation. "Whatever solution they may apply to the problem—and there are many to choose from—they cannot help withdrawing troops from the Western front and so reducing the length of their line. The first front on which they will make a serious resistance will doubtless stretch from Strasbourg through Metz, the Meuse at Mézières, Namur, Brussels and Antwerp." The reasoning recalls, and excels, that Moltke-like assumption which is so severely criticised in *La Conduite de la Guerre*, and is less academically known as "counting your chickens before they are hatched."

Foch showed truer foresight when he passed on to discuss the "characteristics of the war." "What are its requirements? A large number of siege guns, *with plenty of ammunition*." He also stressed the importance of grenades and of engineers, and added: "I have an idea. Has not the experience gained in boring artesian wells and constructing the Paris Underground (*tubes Berlier*) brought to light mechanical means much more rapid than the old ones for running mine galleries and shoring them up, so that heavy charges could be exploded under certain points of the enemy's defences?"

Here he showed a prevision of that mining development which, although tardy, attained a triumph in this same area, at Messines, in June, 1917. The ingenuity of his idea fell short of another conceived, but still-born, in 1915 by the joint brains of Colonel Swinton, the official "Eye-witness" at General Headquarters, and of Major Norton-Griffiths, the well-known mining engineer. Their idea was to run tunnels which should have their concealed exits behind the German line. Then at a given moment, in conjunction with a frontal assault, parties of machine-gunners should emerge from these tunnel-mouths and spread confusion in the enemy's rear. Highly ingenious yet not impracticable, the scheme was one well calculated to cause the collapse of resistance on a chosen sector. It remains one of the great "might-have-beens" of the war, for when submitted to the Chief Engineer at General Headquarters its originality made no appeal. Perhaps if the authors had known that Foch's mind was running in a similar "tunnel," the outcome might have been a different one.

When Foch came, in his report, to discuss the "*place* to choose for an attack," his originality dried up—unlike the place chosen. "The fate of Europe . . . has always been decided in Belgium. . . . A strong attack with our left to begin with, a strong attack with our right [from Verdun] to finish—that is the sum and substance of my idea. . . . I remain faithful to pure theory—that which asserts that it is the destruction of the enemy's military force which will settle everything."

The value and cost of that theory were to be shown during the succeeding years. Its practical limitations did not apparently occur to Foch. He did not pause to ask whether without a key to unlock the barrier he might destroy his own military force faster than the enemy's.

It is fair to say that he concluded his report with the statement: "Our offensive has yet to be organised with a view to operations against fortified positions, in other words siege warfare on a vast scale." But it is too much to say that his offensive operations were organised as siege operations. Nor can we say that he took due account of the time factor. It is not easy to reconcile his view of material requirements with the early date of the

offensive. The time factor can be impaired by undue haste as well as by undue delay.

Foch had in view an attack by d'Urbal's Army on the Wytschaete-Hollebecke sector, in co-operation with the British, and one by Maud'huy's Army just north of Arras. Joffre incorporated this project in a grandiose plan of his own. It has been said that this was hastened by reports that the Germans were withdrawing troops for despatch to Russia, but, on the other hand, Joffre dictated a message to the Grand Duke Nicholas in which he said: "I do not believe in any important transport of German troops from France to Russia."

That same day, December 7th, he issued his orders. Barely a week was allowed for preparation. The main thrusts were to be near Arras and in Champagne, while all the other armies were to make subsidiary attacks. Joffre's orders emphasised his "hopes that the whole effect will be, not only to push the enemy towards the north-east, but to cut his communications with Germany."

The offensive proved not merely a failure, but a fiasco. Near Arras it began on the 17th and was abandoned on the 23rd. In Champagne it was launched on the 20th, along a twenty mile front east of Rheims, and all that the attackers could claim for their heavy loss of life was the capture of the front-line defences. The Army Commander, Langle de Cary, had, indeed, told Poincaré that it would be "much better to mark time for a while" until he had sufficient heavy guns and an unlimited supply of ammunition for the "75's." "The Germans are far too strongly entrenched for us to secure any decision." The attack south-east of Ypres, on the 14th, gained less and spent less. No one, in fact, beyond Foch showed a desire to do anything. And the only effect was on Franco-British relations.

On Churchill's initiative, supported by Kitchener, and temporarily adopted by French, a British proposal had been made for a combined naval and military operation to recover the Belgian coast. For this purpose the British Army would be shifted anew to the left of the Allied line, and so the proposal was made direct to the French Government. Wilson recorded in his diary: "Foch came to . . . tell me that Millerand had sent him a copy

of the precious document sent by Winston, K., Grey and Asquith about our going on the left. Foch much amused. Millerand put this down to Kitchener, but Foch is right in putting it down to Winston. Of course, Foch treats it with the greatest contempt. We went down to see Sir John ; he was quite apologetic about the left-flank scheme, and said it was Winston's idea."

Joffre was equally emphatic in disapproval. His offensive was about to begin, it was sure to succeed, and this "eccentric" move could be no help to it. The British were now completely in the line south of Ypres between Messines and La Bassée, where they were well placed to take part in his offensive—although the strategic choice of this place for an attack overlooked the tactical fact that the troops were embedded in the mud. A Commander-in-Chief could not perhaps be aware of such trifles as that they were still suffering the exhaustion of their defence of Ypres ; that they had not sufficient clothing to provide a change of uniform ; that the shortage of boots was increasing the new ravages of frost-bite ; that there was scarcely any material for building dug-outs and revetting the trenches—not even enough picks and shovels to dig and deepen trenches. Unlike the Germans, they had as yet no grenades or trench-mortars. They were able, it is true, to improvise some—with results that were more often disastrous to themselves than to the enemy. It would be interesting to have an estimate of the attrition suffered by the British Army from its own trench weapons in the first year of the war.

Sir John French this time did not share the confidence of Joffre and Foch. "He impressed on every commander that he was not on any account to get ahead of his neighbours in the attack—everybody was to wait for the man on his left." And in the event everybody did wait, including the left-hand man—after his men had been held up by wire entanglements. No wire-cutting by the artillery had been contemplated. But the French attack, on the British left, was no more effective or energetic. The offensive was thus an undistinguished repetition of that mutual courtesy in waiting extolled in the immortal verse about "Lord Chatham and Sir Richard Strachan." But the British were perhaps the less skilful in disguising their half-heartedness. For they certainly

became the target for Joffre's disappointed ire, and the butt of G.Q.G. criticism. Its members scarcely concealed their opinion that the British Army "might be helpful to hold the line and act defensively, but would be of little use to drive the Germans out of France."

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Wilson was very concerned over this bad impression made on the French. His diary mentions a visit paid to him by Foch on the 17th. "I made the best case I could about advancing in echelon from the left, and he listened without saying a word. At the end he said, '*Mais, mon cher Wilson, nous sommes militaires, pas avocats.*' That exactly expresses the straits I was pushed to. We discussed everything, and he was as nice as could be; but '*Père Joffre n'est pas commode,*' and it was clear that Sir John would be in a very difficult position if he did not put up some fight."

Huguet sheds light on Joffre's resentment against French—"their relations, which had never been trusting or cordial, became colder and colder." "These differences were unfortunately accentuated on the French side by the character of the Commander-in-Chief, little skilled in the management of men and in overcoming difficulties. From the time when, as a result of the victory of the Marne, General Joffre had seen his confidence, prestige and authority grow bigger, he laid claim—in the name of unity of command—to a control over the British Army to which Sir John French submitted with increasing difficulty." And the pages of Poincaré's *Memoirs* bear witness to the increasing bitter complaints made by Joffre about Sir John French and the British effort.

Foch was more sympathetic, more understanding, and more astute. He had urged, with all his violence of gesture, that a greater impulse should be given to the British attack, but he rarely slipped into violence of language. He sought his aims through persuasion and suggestion, realising not merely the futility but the recoil of an attempt to give orders. His was no easy task. Placed geographically between the German devil and the deep sea, he was placed psychologically between Joffre and

French. And admirably, on the whole, did he balance himself on the precarious rail between the slow-burning anger of the French commander and the spontaneous combustion of the British. Joffre's confidence in Foch remained unshaken. In preserving it, Foch again found the value of not preserving others' confidences. For it would appear from Poincaré's *Memoirs* that Foch told Joffre that M. Doumer had recently said to him at Cassel: "If I become Minister of War I shall remove Joffre, who is incapable, and I shall make Galliéni Commander-in-Chief." It is possible, of course, that this was a stretch of imagination rather than a breach of confidence, for it would seem unnaturally foolish for Doumer to disclose his idea to one who was himself the alternative candidate for the command. But Foch at least had the credit for his loyalty to Joffre.

There are, however, some curious incidents, not easy to explain. If we are to believe Clemenceau, Foch asked for a private interview with him at the end of 1914, in order to sound him as to a change in the high command. The following month, while he was driving with Joffre to Dunkirk, their car collided with a broken-down lorry. Foch escaped unhurt, but Joffre was badly bruised and was taken back to his headquarters. Foch himself has related: "I was greatly disturbed and asked myself, 'What would happen in the case of a serious accident?' As his deputy, I accordingly wrote to the Ministry of War. . . . A long time afterwards I received a reply telling me that General Galliéni had a letter of appointment, dated as far back as August, 1914. That was not the best way out of the difficulty. Galliéni would have been quite new to the situation, and would have had to grope his way."

From Foch's *Memoirs* we learn that the Ministry had replied, rather caustically, that he need not concern himself. In view of his close relations with Joffre, it is curious that he should not have been informed of the situation. For, as we have related, Joffre had asked the Government in September to nominate Foch as his successor in case of need, as well as his "adjoint" in Flanders. Joffre certainly felt uncomfortable as long as Galliéni held the nomination, and his feelings were manifested in his repeated

evasion of the call to give Galliéni an active command. As the embarrassed Prime Minister, Viviani, truly said, "It seems to require a good deal of diplomacy to arrange military matters."

Some may deem that Foch's enquiry was inspired by the idea of suggestion rather than the desire for information. Yet against this sceptical view we need to remember that we hear of the enquiry from Foch's own lips. Perhaps the truest explanation is that if Foch was spurred by ambition it was not, primarily, a mere personal ambition. Few men have shown a greater sense of self-subordination to a cause. But in sinking all his personal affections and desires in that cause, he identified himself the more completely with it, and thus became identical with it in his own eyes. The confusion is natural, and is often to be discerned in the world's great men.

Feeling that he himself was capable of guiding the cause to a true and successful end, he was driven to make use of all opportunities which might give him fuller power of guidance. We may feel that sometimes his means were open to suspicion, open to question; that they savoured of what the Protestant world is apt to denote by the term "jesuitical." But the end was pure. This the most critical student is drawn to believe as his study of Foch extends, even though he may still feel that the end was more pure than true.

This conclusion would also explain what is more difficult to justify—Foch's comment on Galliéni's nomination. Rationally it is far-fetched. Galliéni had shown his capacity, a supreme capacity, to grip the situation on the Marne, where there was far less time for contemplation. He had, further, grasped the conditions of trench warfare before Foch had begun to grope his way towards reality. It is far clearer that in Foch's comment the wish was father to the thought.

But it is of historical interest to note that when, in March, Joffre again pressed the Government to allow him to designate his own possible successor—as he would "never, in any circumstances, allow Galliéni to replace him"*—the agreed choice was

* Poincaré, *Memoirs*, 1915, p. 59.

not Foch, but Dubail, the calm-mannered commander of the Eastern Army Group.

Foch was the other Army Group Commander. On January 5th he had been formally given command of the Northern Group of Armies, while Joffre himself retained immediate command of the Centre Group—an unsound arrangement—until June, when Castelnau took it over.

During the comparative lull that followed the autumn crisis at Ypres, Foch himself found little rest. It was not in his nature to be quiet. Yet there are incidents recorded which show him in less vibrant light. Thus, for example, just as the German attacks were dying down, Lord Roberts came out to France. Accompanied by Wilson and by his son-in-law, Major Lewin, he visited Foch at Cassel, renewing amid the turmoil of war the memories of how they had foreshadowed it in the quiet of Englemere. Fittingly it was a day of storm and rain, and, unhappily, the aged Field-Marshal caught a chill. Next day he had passed to eternal quiet—as Wilson recorded, in a sentence that does something to redeem his diary: “The story of his life is thus completed as he would have wished himself, dying in the middle of the soldiers he loved so well and within the sound of the guns.” Foch attended the funeral service at St. Omer on behalf of the French Army.

A fortnight earlier Foch had been host under happier auspices. Poincaré paid a visit to his headquarters at Cassel, and recorded: “It is impossible to imagine any finer observation post, and from the window where our table is laid we have a splendid look-out over the Flemish Plain stretching at our feet, dotted by thirty-two towns, the plain which, century in century out, has been the constant theatre of battles of every sort and size. What Foch does not know is not worth knowing about the victors who have preceded him at Cassel—Robert le Frison, Philippe le Valois and the duc d’Orleans; he has military history at his finger tips, and his talk is brimming over with anecdotes and comparisons. . . .” Poincaré was even more gratified to hear, from Joffre, that “Foch has gained a happy influence over the British Field-Marshal,” and that in consequence Joffre no longer wished, at the moment, to secure Sir John French’s removal. On a later visit Poincaré made

the interesting comment, "Foch . . . is as careful of my safety as he is careless of his own. . . ."

At the end of November, King George came on a visit to his own army, and, while in Flanders, decorated Foch with the Grand Cross of the Bath.

Soon afterwards, Foch was concerned with the internal affairs of the British Army. In his ultimate counsel he showed good judgment, and a better perception of his allies' character than some of his compatriots. Wilson and the French chiefs had been working to secure the removal of Archibald Murray from the post of Chief of Staff to Sir John French, and the intervention of the French Government had even been enlisted. But in a letter to Joffre on January 5th, Foch said :

"My telegram in cipher dispatched today gave you a brief account of my knowledge of Field-Marshal French's intentions with regard to a prospective change in his Chief of Staff. Whether he has asked to keep him I do not know ; I do not think so. But he may have abstained from asking for his recall, he may even have reacted against some of our manœuvres for having him recalled. For I know that when he learnt of the steps we had taken he said that in those circumstances he could do nothing.

"English pride demands that Murray stays where he is. Anyhow, Lord Kitchener and Mr. Asquith would not hear of General Wilson as his successor. . . . When Murray is recalled and Wilson has gained people's confidence, I believe that we shall be able to progress ; it seems in our interest to leave the affair at that. We might waste time and energy otherwise. The Field-Marshal is asking why we cannot busy ourselves with our own affairs and leave his alone. . . ."

This account is supplemented by a passage in Wilson's diary of which the pith is : "Anyhow, the net result is that Murray is more firmly established than ever, and Sir John hinted that the less work I did the better. I might go to Russia and see what they were doing there. How funny ! . . . I cannot get up any sorrow at not serving him or Asquith or K. as Chief of Staff." Thus, also, do we understand Wilson's entry on New Year's Eve : "And so the year goes out in wind and rain and sobs. . . . Foch came to see me and to wish me a happy New Year."

A few days later Foch was able to give Joffre more cheering news, and a tactful hint :

"General Murray is leaving the English Army, ostensibly because of his health. It might be advisable to make another distribution of medals among the English generals. The Field-Marshal wished to remind me of it. Murray is replaced by General Robertson, a good choice in default of Wilson. Wilson remains head of operations and of relations with us. His status has not been raised, but his position is growing more important. That is the chief thing. . . ."

This was not exact. Wilson had been given the title of Principal Liaison Officer with the French Army, but ceased to be Sub-Chief of the General Staff; in compensation he was made temporary lieutenant-general. The change ostensibly deprived him of influence over the British operations and so threatened to diminish his value to the French, but through his personal influence with Sir John French he retained much of his power—at the expense of Robertson.

Thus he was able to aid G.Q.G. in rallying Sir John French to join in resisting proposals for a move in the Near East as an alternative to frontal assaults on the trench barrier. It was the easier to ensure French's opposition because Kitchener leant to the opposite view.

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In a letter to French on January 2nd Kitchener discerningly said : "I suppose we must now recognise that the French Army cannot make a sufficient break through the German lines to bring about the retreat of the German forces in Northern France. If that is so, then the German lines in France may be looked upon as a fortress that cannot be carried by assault and also that cannot be completely invested, with the result that the lines may be held by an investing force, whilst operations proceed elsewhere." French promptly became almost as confident of a break-through as were Joffre and Foch. Yet while asserting his faith in his reply, he somewhat inconsistently added that the ultimate decision would have to be gained on the Eastern Front.

The British Cabinet, especially Lloyd George and Churchill,

shared Kitchener's view. Feeling that the trench-front in France was impregnable to frontal attacks, they had strong objection to wasting the man-power of the new armies in a vain effort, and at the same time felt increasing concern over the possibility of a Russian collapse. When this was told to Joffre he declared that they were "demented." They had not to wait many months for the unfortunate vindication of their view.

In a paper of December 29th the Secretary of the War Council, Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Hankey, emphasised the deadlock and suggested that Germany could be struck more effectively through her allies, especially Turkey—he might with justice have adduced the example of Napoleon in 1796. His proposal was that the first three of the newly raised army corps might be used for an attack on Constantinople, if possible in co-operation with Greece and Bulgaria. It would, he argued, be a means not only to overthrow Turkey and bring the weight of the Balkans into the scale, but to open a line of supply with Russia, already suffering a shortage of munitions while possessing a surplus of wheat. In comment on this proposal it is worth mention that a strategic reserve of exactly this size was the instrument by which the Germans obtained their three great successes of 1917.

Lloyd George went further, advocating the transfer of the bulk of the British force to the Balkans, both to succour Serbia and to develop an attack on the rear of the hostile alliance. This larger-scale move found more support, curiously, in France than in England, and amongst soldiers as well as statesmen. Franchet d'Esperey had been its first advocate, and in January, 1915, Galliéni suggested a landing at Salonika for a march on Constantinople as a preliminary to an advance up the Danube with an army strong enough to encourage Greece, Bulgaria, and Rumania to join with it.

But all such suggestions, whether British or French, met with the strongest resistance from Joffre, with French in tow. The French Cabinet, as Poincaré's *Memoirs* have vividly revealed, weakened at the knees whenever confronted by Joffre. His prestige had been so enhanced by the legend of the Marne that a mere hint of resignation produced abject submission to his will.

In England political opinion was strengthened by the presence of Kitchener in the Cabinet. But the French Cabinet's surrender to Joffre weakened him, for his loyal support of both French and the French was carried to the pitch where he sacrificed his own truer judgment. Just as his affection for France was an earlier instinct than his love of the East, so it now took priority over his belief in the opportunity that the eastern theatre offered. Thus far-reaching was the sequel to his service of France as a young volunteer in 1870.

At the War Council meeting on January 8th he himself suggested the Dardanelles as the most suitable objective, and thought that 150,000 troops would suffice—a figure that agreed with Hankey's estimate. But he said that for the moment no troops were available, as he anticipated that the Germans were about to make another bid to break through in the west. In this anticipation he read Falkenhayn's mind aright, but not the conclusion into which Falkenhayn finally drifted. Drift rather than decision also marked the Allied plan. Only the military chiefs had made up their minds definitely—to attempt the impracticable. But their singleness of aim, however impossible, sufficed to nullify all others. And they profited from Kitchener's fear of a German offensive in the west to drag him, and his new armies, into repeated Allied offensives whose futility he clearly saw.

The Dardanelles scheme did not die, but was emasculated. It received artificial respiration from Russia's passing need for relief from Turkish pressure in the Caucasus. The outcome of the Grand Duke Nicholas's appeal for a diversion was the British Cabinet's decision to try a purely naval attack on the Dardanelles, in default of available troops. When this failed, a failure accelerated by "heart failure" in the naval command, British prestige was too far committed and the naval attack was converted into a land attack—against a forewarned foe. Worse still, the initial forfeit of surprise was followed by the disregard of all other conditions of success. Effort was never in time or in the force for a decisive result.

If the British had used at the outset even a fair proportion of

the force they eventually expended in dribblets, it is clear from Turkish accounts that victory would have been theirs, and equally clear from German verdicts how far-reaching would have been the effect on the main enemy.

In weakening the chain of action, Churchill's perhaps too exclusive sense of the importance of time and Kitchener's reluctance to spare force in time combined to cause a double strain. But the real cause of fracture was the opposing pull of Joffre, backed by Foch, Wilson, and French. If it is to the discredit of the Cabinets that they failed to impose their own truer and wider view, it is also to the discredit of the military chiefs in France that they failed to practise that "intellectual discipline" which Foch had so eloquently preached.

Poincaré on January 7th records : " Joffre is dead against any operations in the Near East, and tells us that he requires all the men that we can possibly send him . . . he has good reason to think that, a little sooner or a little later, we shall pierce the German lines." " His tone is as creamy as ever, but he speaks his mind very distinctly and leaves us in no sort of doubt as to the fixity of his conviction ; and Viviani, Briand, and I feel that for the moment we can do and say no more." Poincaré went on the 11th to see Foch again at Cassel, and found him " as impetuous as Joffre is serene, but equally confident."

When Poincaré saw some of the Army Commanders, however, he discovered that " the more junior the General, the less rosy is his outlook." He became still more doubtful when his old colleague Messimy, now serving with the army and decorated for bravery, came to tell him : " At Chantilly [where G.Q.G. had now taken up its abode] they are living in a glorified fool's paradise, and know little of the actual happenings in the fighting-line. Local offensives are ordered to feed the press communiqués, and these offensives are costly in life and foredoomed to failure." Knowledge of the facts and their own impotence occasionally led to hysterical outbursts in the French Cabinet, but its members came to heel at the hint that if " they worry the Commander-in-Chief, he may very likely tender his resignation, which would upset the army and the country alike."

Henry Wilson's diary also sheds several gleams of light on this period, and on Foch's attitude. Churchill had crossed the Channel to see French with the object of persuading him to agree that the Regular 29th Division, now ready in England, should be sent to the Near East instead of to France. French consulted Wilson. Perhaps with a little prompting from Wilson—"Sir John told me to get the French to combat the idea for all they were worth." They at least did not need much prompting. When, a few days later, Bonar Law, the leader of the Opposition in Parliament, came to St. Omer, Wilson "seized the opportunity to deprecate strongly the project of diverting any troops to the Balkans, and also to convey the intimation that Joffre and Foch were both entirely opposed to anything of the sort."

A day or two earlier, on February 3rd, Wilson had visited Foch, and talked over the recent crisis in his own affairs. "Foch had not seen me since all these troubles, and he was as nice as could be. He said he would have resigned if I had gone, etc." "We discussed the situation. He does not expect the Russians to move till the end of March. He thinks that the Russians can hold Warsaw, and as they will slowly get stronger their position becomes better." The deduction overlooked material factors, especially the munition shortage, that only the opening of the Dardanelles could relieve. "He hopes the Germans will attack here, and he thinks that after the mud is gone he will be able to blow down opposition with guns. He said a curious thing: 'You English must not invite a long war by dilatory action; we French cannot go on for years, so send everyone you can as fast as you can.' This has set me thinking, and I am not sure what it all means. Can France be getting tired, as well as getting cross with us?"

Foch's implied criticism of the British also overlooked material factors. For while the French were overcoming the shortage of shells from which their troops had suffered in the autumn offensives, the available allowance for the British field-guns at this time was limited to four rounds per gun per day! Moreover, high-explosive shell, alone of use against trenches, formed only a small proportion of the whole supply; this was the fault of the

pre-war General Staff, which, unlike those of the Continent, had neglected the evidence of the Balkan War of 1912.

It would seem that Foch's criticism was based on a non-material assumption. For in Wilson's record of a conversation with Foch—after the December failure—we find: "He agreed with me in thinking that the French Army of today is much better than that of August last. He agreed in thinking that this was due to great changes in superior commands, to the mental effect on both French and German minds in August of the events of 1870, and the consequent gain in *moral* on the French side and loss on the German as the campaign developed. For the English, the voluntary system is quite sufficient to account for the marked deterioration." The meaning of this badly expressed sentence would seem to be that the French had now shed the sense of inferiority, and the Germans the sense of superiority, which had, as a legacy from 1870, influenced the result of the opening encounters. If French morale was at the end of 1914 so much superior to British, one wonders how Foch accounted for the failure of the much larger-scale French offensive to achieve more success than the British. For the logical inference did not reflect well on those "changes in superior commands" which had brought into his hands the direction of the offensive. His assumption, too, of the decline in German morale was hardly borne out in the battles of 1915.

Early in February Joffre formulated his offensive plan—that of converging blows from Artois and Champagne upon the great salient formed by the entrenched German front, to be followed by an offensive in Lorraine against the communications of the German armies. The idea was similar to that of Foch in 1918, but a vital difference lay in the conditions existing, the methods employed, and the material available. Only in man-power had Joffre even a superiority, and there only a narrow margin—in January 85 French, 13 British, and 6 Belgian divisions against 98 German.

Joffre asked the British to contribute to his Artois offensive by a synchronised attack towards La Bassée on March 7th. But he also asked them to relieve his IX Corps near Ypres in order

that it could reinforce his Artois offensive. And he made this attack contingent on the relief. In view of the recent growth of the British forces, the request was reasonable, so far as the calculation was based on man-power and mileage; a comparison of gun-power put it in a different light. But Joffre was not tactful, and French not reasonable, in the handling of the discussion.

Wilson relates that "Sir John showed much anger at the tone of Joffre's letter, brought by Belin last night; and Sir John, who had arranged to meet Foch and Belin at Cassel at 11 a.m., refused to go. The letter from Joffre was a stupid one, inaccurate in some important details and rather hectoring in tone. . . . Robertson told Belin that Sir John flatly refused to relieve anybody before April 1st, and even then did not promise. This was difficult. Foch asked again for one division of the IX Corps to be relieved, and I lean very much to this solution. Foch says that this division is essential to the success of his operations at Arras."

But French, apparently backed by Robertson, hinted at no such concession in his reply to Joffre, and intimated that no relief could take place before April 1st. When Foch heard of this he was much upset, arguing that such a statement was "nonsense" in view of the reinforcements French had already received. The reply also seems to have shaken Joffre's confidence in Wilson's powers, for he wrote and told Foch to negotiate with French direct. He also gave Huguet a sharp rebuke for "being too pro-English."

French's obstinacy was aggravated by resentment at Kitchener's withholding of the 29th Division. And even Foch's good-humoured tact had no power to dispel French's childlike fit of sulks. But the British troops were the chief sufferers.

For Joffre, equally if differently obstinate, intimated that his own offensive was postponed as the relief had not taken place, and sent French his ironical-sounding wishes for the success of the British attack. And French determined to persevere with this attack single-handed, to show the French what he could do.

The attack was launched at Neuve Chapelle on March 10th, by Haig's First Army. In detail the design was good, but lack

of heavy guns and high explosive reduced the frontage of attack to a mere two thousand yards. By an intense bombardment of 35 minutes' duration, the German first line was stormed by surprise, while the artillery lengthened its range and dropped a curtain of fire beyond. But when, in the second phase, the frontage was extended, the artillery support proved inadequate, while delays had given the Germans five clear hours to reorganise their resistance. Then, too late and mistakenly, Haig ordered the attack to be pressed "regardless of loss." And loss was the only result.

Foch had not been content to follow his chief's unhelpful attitude, but he found the British in a morose mood. According to Wilson's diary for March 13th, "Foch came to say he was collecting eight batteries of heavy artillery and some infantry towards Vermelles to help Haig in his attack on La Bassée, and he wanted to know where to put these troops, and so on. Sir John would not tell him anything, said he wished to keep his moves and Haig's secret." It would seem, more probably, that he wished to hide his failure.

Joffre, however, did not feel commiseration, nor was he appeased. When Wilson went to Chantilly ten days later, Joffre began, at dinner, by loudly remarking: "Well, your Chief's extremely tiresome." Then, as proof of his power, he related how he had been given "absolute *carte blanche* till May" as a result of telling the Cabinet: "If you take away one single man that I can use on my front *I will resign*." He followed this by an attack on French, "who calls me C.-in-C. and disobeys my orders," and a declaration that he was going to write to French "outspokenly." To Wilson, who tried to smooth things over, he was, however, "really charming." "Then he went on to talk of his own plans, how he calculated that by the end of April he would be in a condition to *attack* and *break* the line. . . . He had stopped the Champagne attack, having got all he could out of it, and was well satisfied, although he had lost 40,000 men in a month." This version for British consumption may be compared with the unusually candid report made to Poincaré by the liaison officer between G.Q.G. and the Government:

"Colonel Pénélon, just arrived from G.Q.G., tells me frankly that the operations in Champagne have definitely failed, and Joffre has to resign himself to breaking them off."

Joffre, however, had lost none of his confidence. On March 21st he saw the Cabinet and guaranteed imminent success. Poincaré recorded: "He means to be busy again about the middle of April, when he will attack at two points and feels sure of getting through. He is perfectly explicit and precise. It is on the Western Front that a decision will be reached, and this will probably be before the summer, certainly before the autumn." The Germans "are already sliding down towards defeat." "Joffre is a little bitter when speaking of the English; he refuses to give them Dunkirk, though Kitchener says he will not, without it, be able to supply his troops. Our General is imbued in this matter with a rather dangerous spirit of controversy, against which I try to warn him, but nothing will move him. I remind him that if we do not come to amicable terms with the English they may send their armies elsewhere than to France."

Joffre, however, was not disturbed by this argument. He repeated, "I reckon on obtaining some decisive success before the month of May," and graciously declared that he did not mind if some troops were sent elsewhere subsequently. "The good humour, the frankness, the gentle obstinacy of the man combine to leave the best impression on the Ministers, who feel their confidence in him renewed."

On the 29th Kitchener and French came to Chantilly for a conference with Joffre. Wilson recorded: "Kitchener began about Holland and what should be done if Germany went to war. Kitchener favoured sending a lot of troops and making it the decisive theatre. Joffre, of course, would not hear of it. Joffre then gave a general review of the situation, declaring this to be the decisive theatre, and that, by May 1st, he and Sir John would attack and break the line." The discussion later turned on to the Dardanelles. "Sir John hoped no more troops would be sent. Kitchener said: *none*, there were already 67,000 available there." There is a curious want of logic in this assumption that

now the Turks had been put on their guard, a force that was less than half the original estimate would suffice to break it.

Foch spent the latter part of March and early April in drawing up his plan for the Artois offensive and co-ordinating it with the British plan. On April 13th Poincaré and Millerand visited the chosen front of attack between Arras and Lens. Among others they saw Pétain, " a tall, strapping, beautifully groomed soldier, who explained with luminous clarity his arrangements and dispositions, but had no illusions as to any blazing success." " At Cassel, however, we found Foch as full of zest as ever, and still confident that with the early days of May we may score something like a real decision ; he thinks that a way may be found through Arras, and on his big map laid his finger on Fleurus and Waterloo with the words : " There is where we ought to win."

The coming weeks would show that certain tactical obstacles lay in the path of this strategical dream of avenging history.

Chapter XII

"GAS"

ON April 22nd, 1915, came a dramatic forewarning of the enemy's power to upset preconceived ideas. At five o'clock in the evening a German bombardment, as sudden as it was severe, opened north of Ypres. From the German trenches two curious wraiths of greenish-yellow fog crept forward, spread until they became one, and then, moving on, changed into a blue-white mist. It hung, as it had come, over the front of the two French Divisions—one of Algerians, one of Territorials—which held the left of the salient, adjoining the Canadian Division. Soon officers behind the front were startled to see a torrent of terrified humanity pouring backward. The Africans, nearest the British, were coughing and pointing to their throats as they fled. The French guns were still firing, but about 7 p.m. these suddenly and ominously became silent.

The fugitives left behind a gap over four miles wide, filled only by the dead and by those who lay suffocating in agony from chlorine-gas poisoning. By introducing a new weapon the Germans had achieved perhaps the most startling and paralysing surprise of the war, although on a relatively small scale. With the aid of gas they had removed the defenders of the north flank of the Ypres salient as deftly as if extracting the molars on one side of a jaw. They had only to push south four miles to reach Ypres and loosen all the teeth by pressure from the rear. That evening they walked forward two miles and then, strangely, stopped. Ten days later they were only a few hundred yards nearer Ypres.

The Germans had found a key that would open the trench barrier, but having unlocked the gate they failed to press it ajar.

This forfeit of a great opportunity, one that could never fully return, was due to want of faith and foresight among the German command. No reserves had been concentrated to pour through the breach—because Falkenhayn had allotted none. His idea was merely to try the gas as an experimental aid to an attack which was itself merely a diversion to distract attention from his coming blow against the Russians. If the Ypres salient could be erased, so much the better, but he did not take any longer view.

Moreover, only a short-distance objective was assigned to the attacking troops, no special tactics had been thought out, and they had only been issued with the crudest form of respirator, which many of them even did not wear. Thus when they saw the effect on the French troops, fear of their own gas discouraged them from pressing on further than their allotted objective, and so prevented them discovering how completely resistance had disappeared.

That the French were even more unprepared to resist the gas was due to the obtuseness of their commanders. For they had adequate warning. Towards the end of March prisoners taken on the south of the salient, then held by the French, gave full details of the placing of gas cylinders in the trenches. These details were published in the Bulletin of the Tenth Army in Artois, whither this French division went, but do not seem to have reached the divisions that were left in the salient. An even more complete and localised warning was given on April 13th by a German deserter who surrendered near Langemarck in the sector of the French XX Corps, Foch's old corps. One of the crude respirators issued to the German troops was actually found on him.

The divisional commander, Ferry, gravely impressed, warned his superior as well as both his French and British neighbours. But the corps commander, Balfourier, deemed him a credulous fool. And when he repeated the warning to the liaison officer from G.Q.G. it was dismissed as a myth, while Ferry was rebuked for warning the British direct.

General Putz, who, with his two second-rate divisions, re-

lieved the XX Corps, was no more inclined to believe the story than Balfourier, although a fresh warning came from Belgian sources on April 16th. Putz did, indeed, mention the story scoffingly to the British liaison officer, but apparently did not think it worth repeating to his own troops. So they waited in ignorance until suffocation overtook them.

Foch's responsibility in the matter is uncertain, but it is certain that he neither emphasised nor co-ordinated the warnings. It would seem that while his eyes were on the plane of high strategy, his ears were not kept on the ground.

On hearing the news of the German break-through, Foch sent word, about midnight, to Putz that he "should (1) make sure of holding on to the line he occupied; (2) organise a base of departure for a counter-attack to regain the ground lost; (3) counter-attack." For the last purpose he ordered a division of the XX Corps to be sent back from Arras, and also warned Maud'huy that he might want more.

Actually, the French were barely able to fulfil the first point. The remnants of Putz's divisions, which had lost their artillery, were aligned along the canal, where they had halted in their westward flight. In the space of four and a half miles between the raw edge of the Canadian front and the canal—which formed the chord of the salient—stood only a few scattered packets of Canadians and French. Twenty-four hours later this broad path to Ypres and the British rear was almost filled, but only weakly filled, with Canadian and English reserves.

That morning Sir John French had gone to Cassel, where Foch assured him that he intended to regain the lost ground, and had ordered up large reinforcements. French promised to co-operate in any counter-offensive, but told Foch that unless the ground was regained soon he must be free to withdraw his men from the now dangerously contracted salient.

Twice during the day Foch himself drove to see Putz and urge him to action. But Putz was not in a condition to attack, and nothing happened. It is clear that Foch's assurance outstripped the facts. Unfortunately, French, in expectation of such action, ordered a series of hasty and ill-supported attacks which failed

with heavy loss. Moreover, a renewed gas attack on the 24th against the jagged corner of the Canadian front cut a fresh slice off the salient. It had now been reduced to a narrow tongue of land, barely three miles across, although six miles to the tip. Thus, in attempting to hold it, the defenders were so crowded that they provided an easy harvest for the German guns. But French, beguiled by Foch's optimism, hesitated to sanction any withdrawal.

Reminiscing after the war, Foch spoke of how he had dealt with the emergency of April 22nd: "One knew nothing, one could know nothing, and if one waited till the next day it meant a break-through. I sent Desticker to Elverdinghe. He 'legged' it all night long. During this time Weygand and I at Cassel were warning the divisions at Arras. . . . They arrived at the rate of one a day. The gap was closed!"

These remarks show the fallibility of memory, if they also illustrate Foch's peculiarly strong tendency to assume that the facts of a situation coincided with his conception of it. For the prevention of a break-through was primarily due to the fact that the Germans were not aiming at one, and so did not exploit the one actually made. Only three French divisions were brought from Artois, and the first did not arrive on the battlefield until the 25th, so that the Germans had time to consolidate their hold. Thirdly, and most important, Foch's aim was not merely to "close the gap," but to regain the lost ground. And this aim did not have its fulfilment in action.

The one bright spot on the 24th was that the German attack on the "hinge" of the salient was repulsed by the Belgians; henceforth the Germans were unable either to widen or deepen their small foothold across the canal. On the evening of that day Foch came to see French, told him that the 153rd Division was detraining at Cassel, handed him an autograph note which said that a second French division would arrive early on the morrow, asked that the British should assemble strong reserves at the same time, and concluded: "We will take a vigorous offensive against the front Steenstraat, Pilckem, Langemarck, and east of these places." But next day only one regiment of the leading division

had come up, and Putz did nothing. The British duly launched their attack, and 2,400 men of one brigade were "mown down like corn, by machine-guns in enfilade"—a higher cost than was paid that same day for the capture of the Gallipoli beaches.

Sir John French irately remarked that, as the French had got the Second Army into this difficulty, they ought to get it out, but he nevertheless ordered Smith-Dorrien, the Army Commander, to resume the attack next day. So, on the 26th, four brigades were launched, and lost 4,000 men without result. This time the French counter-attack developed, but on the right it recoiled with fresh loss of ground in face of a local discharge of gas, and on the left lost heavily for little gain.

Next morning, the 27th, Smith-Dorrien learnt that Putz had no further reinforcements. Realising the futility of such fragmentary attacks, he wrote to General Headquarters, saying: "I am doubtful if it is worth losing any more men to regain this French ground unless the French do something really big." He further suggested that it would be wise to prepare for a withdrawal to a less acutely bent line nearer Ypres. All that he got in reply was a telephone message from Robertson: "Chief does not regard situation nearly so unfavourable as your letter represents." In fact, however, Smith-Dorrien's letter was more optimistic than the grim conditions justified. This comforting message from a comfortably remote General Headquarters was followed by a worse rebuff—a telegram, sent through unciphered, telling Smith-Dorrien to hand over command of all the troops engaged at Ypres to General Plumer. In this way French seized the opportunity to pay off a debt of dislike which had accumulated at compound interest since Smith-Dorrien had saved French's situation against his own orders at La Cateau in August, 1914.

Before this telegram reached Smith-Dorrien there had been a repetition of the tragic farce on the front. Foch had magisterially told Putz that his forces were sufficient "to carry the affair to a successful conclusion." Putz duly ordered a fresh attack, but his troops did not make it, as they were pinned to the ground by a heavy barrage. They made an attempt in the evening which was quickly stopped. The British made two attempts, and so

lost more men without more result. The day ended with a fresh gas panic among the French-African troops.

Next morning, Plumer's first instructions were to prepare the very withdrawal that Smith-Dorrien had suggested—a paradoxical sequel to the rebuke he had suffered. But when French went off to see Foch at Cassel and came back with a changed outlook. He had taken the line that the fighting at Ypres was a secondary affair compared with the coming offensive at Arras. But Foch argued vehemently against any withdrawal, said that the lost ground could be retaken by the troops already present, and declared that to win a second battle it was not necessary to lose a first. He begged French to postpone any withdrawal until he had seen the results of the French attacks to be made next day with the help of "a strong force of heavy artillery" that was being sent. This actually consisted of nine batteries of light-heavy guns; it is difficult to see any reason, beyond a Fochian discount of material factors, for imagining that such a handful could reverse the whole situation. But French gave way before Foch's discharge of "gas."

To avoid any risk of a change of mind, Foch followed up the interview with a letter. In it, he argued that "the new position selected for the British Army is at the foot of the ridge, and will be more difficult to hold than the present one on the crest"; that the enemy would be able to dominate the British line of supply with his guns; that a withdrawal would be "a confession of impotence: it will simply invite a very strong German effort." His characteristic final argument was—"the moral ascendancy will pass to the Germans." He drew the "conclusion" that a retirement "should be forbidden," and begged French "to be good enough to keep to his present intention, and to support the French *offensive to retake the Langemarck region at all costs, beginning at noon on the 29th.*"

Foch's initial arguments were sound in themselves, if they exaggerated the undulations, and the value of command, in a region where scarcely any part of the "crest" was more than 160 feet above sea-level. But the root fault of his arguments was that they took so little account of the means and practicability

of regaining the lost ground. True to his favourite quotation, he asked himself "what must be done," but did not ask how it was to be done.

The days that followed were a comedy behind the front, a tragedy for the troops in front. Day after day, French heard from his subordinates of the sufferings of the men and of the continued absence of the ever-promised French offensive. Thereupon he would incline towards a withdrawal, only to be swung the other way by Foch's buoyant assurances or flattering entreaties. In the carefully weighed words of the official history of this battle, "For ill now, although for weal in the last year of the war, General Foch was the very spirit of the offensive."

On the 29th Foch sent word that the offensive would be postponed twenty-four hours, as the newly arrived guns had not had time to register. French agreed to keep his troops in their position for another day. On the 30th Putz, under pressure from Foch, ordered the offensive, but his right did not move, his centre could not move, and his left would not move—after one abortive trial. Curé, commanding the left wing, "came to the conclusion that, owing to lack of sufficient heavy artillery, no advantage could be gained by continuing the general offensive." He had lost 4,000 men since the 26th in recovering yard by yard the little village of Lizerne on the *west* bank of the canal.

Yet on the evening of the 30th Foch again drove to see French, and "at his urgent request the British commander agreed a second time to a postponement of twenty-four hours, although this meant leaving his troops exposed on three sides to artillery fire and suffering heavy wastage with little opportunity for reply."

Foch compelled Putz to order a renewed attack on May 1st, but when the hour came "the French infantry did not leave its trenches." Foch, *le dieu de la guerre*, might propose, but the men were not disposed—to make a useless sacrifice of their lives. They had shot their bolt.

And, later in the day, Foch came to French and said that his view had been overridden by Joffre, who, so far from sending reinforcements, was calling for troops to be sent from Ypres to reinforce the Arras offensive. French naturally jumped at the

chance to order the long-planned and long-postponed withdrawal.

Its sequel appeared to justify Foch's prediction that a withdrawal would invite the enemy to make a fresh effort. For, after cautiously following, the Germans, on May 8th, launched against the new line an attack which lasted six days. But it was also the form of the new line which invited attack. French had overruled the fighting commanders' wish to withdraw to the natural straight line of defence formed by the ramparts of Ypres and the canal. Instead, the withdrawal was stopped on a line well short of Ypres. It still formed a salient, and, if flatter than the original, was more inconvenient for defence and control, the head being exposed to pounding from all sides, while Ypres itself formed a dangerously narrow throat of supply and communication.

The cause of this unhappy mean was in part the sentimental objection to yielding ground, especially the now historic ground of Ypres, and in part the requirement of being able to assist the still-promised French offensive. This was made at last on May 15th, but both its scale and its scope were small, and it merely removed the German foothold on the Allied side of the canal—truly a mountain that was long in labour and brought forth a mouse. And having forfeited sixty thousand men for the privilege of acting as midwife, the British were left to hold the cramped new salient, which has been aptly termed "one huge artillery target."

Chapter XIII

BLUNTING THE SWORD OF FRANCE

THE conduct of Foch at "Second Ypres" is worth detailed study, because it reveals the difference between conception and reality, between the commander's picture and the combatants' situation. It illustrates also Foch's tendency to assume that his issue of orders was equivalent to their execution.

It is possible to feel that at "First Ypres," despite his illusions, which there mattered less, his unquenchable spirit was of real benefit, even though its rays only reached the back of the front. But at Second Ypres his illusions are seen, in the cool, clear light of history, to have been of undiluted harm.

In fairness, we should remember that his mind was also occupied with his forthcoming Arras offensive. He would seem to have felt, correctly, that the French loss of ground at Ypres was a matter affecting the British more than the French. In these circumstances it was unfortunate that he did not leave the British to work out their own salvation and to apply their own solution at the right time. But it is also fair to add that Wilson constituted himself the instrument of Foch's will in influencing the decisions of French. Wilson had underlined all Foch's arguments for regaining the lost ground and had protested against the withdrawal. When French finally disregarded these protests, Wilson confided to his diary the doleful cry: "It is a real bad business."

However, he found consolation in a visit to Chantilly, where Ypres was forgotten in the sunrise of the Arras offensive. Joffre "was very hopeful of Foch's coming attack on Friday. Said he was bringing up even more troops and really thought he would break the line past mending, and that it might be, and ought to

be, the beginning of the end. He talked of getting to Namur and the war being over in three months." Wilson went on to the Tenth Army, now placed under d'Urbal, where he was given a front seat in the stalls from which he could watch the curtain go up.

The offensive was fixed to begin on May 7th, but bad weather postponed it until the 9th. The immediate objective was Vimy Ridge, and Foch's reason for choosing it was that "the wide extent of ground it commands and the practicability of the terrain it dominates, as well as the impossibility for an enemy to make any addition to his defensive organisation, would give the possession of the ridge an immense value and lead to the piercing of the enemy's line." His plan was to deliver the principal attack straight at the ridge, aided by subsidiary attacks on each flank; the northern one coming a day earlier in order to capture the eastern spur of Notre Dame de Lorette, which endangered the flank of the main attack. Still further north, the IX Corps and the British First Army would strike a day later to widen the gap. But when the opening was postponed it was decided to make all the attacks simultaneously on the 9th.

The British attack was nearly postponed altogether. French, full of anxiety over the situation at Ypres, had written to Kitchener on May 2nd complaining of Foch's nonchalance: "I have spoken very seriously to him about recent events, and have warned him that if his part of the line in the north is in my opinion not yet sufficiently strong (with a good deal to spare in view of possible gas annoyances), I shall abandon my support of him in the big business and reinforce my left. . . ." But in the end he yielded to Foch's pressing entreaties, and agreed to make the promised attack.

If superior numbers—the "big battalions"—were sufficient for success, it was amply assured. The Tenth Army was given 18 divisions besides 3 cavalry divisions for its attack on a narrow twelve-mile frontage—against 4 German divisions. More important, it had 1,252 guns, of which 293 were heavy. Foch asked for 90,000 rounds of heavy and 600,000 of field-gun ammunition—and, unlike his British comrades, received all he asked. Actually,

he was to use four and three times as many respectively before he learnt that weight of metal did not make a key to success.

The plan definitely abandoned the idea of surprise. The attack, as a result of deductions from the winter experience, was to be preceded by a four-day bombardment, "slow, methodical, and prolonged, with the object of destroying the enemy's morale, disorganising his defensive measures and breaking up his obstacles and strong points." It was actually prolonged to six days. For the attack itself the new method of limited objectives was adopted, the first day's objective being the three-mile stage to the crest of Vimy Ridge.

In this methodical organisation Pétain, commanding the left centre corps, excelled. He personally visited every battery and watched each fire one round in order to see that it had registered on the exact target assigned in his artillery plan. Everywhere he questioned the regimental officers and N.C.O.'s to make sure that they were clear as to their individual rôle. If such attention to detail violated the canons of command, and would certainly have been anathema to a Foch, it paid in a type of war where the general was reduced to the rôle of a machine-tender.

Wilson's diary contains a vivid impression of the opening hours of May 9th. "The Frenchmen began to fire at 6 a.m., and fired till 10 a.m. . . . The gunning was incessant; from 9.30 to 9.40 an increase, from 9.40 to 9.50 less, from 9.50 to 10 o'clock appalling. Twelve hundred guns served by Frenchmen and lashing to their utmost. No living person has ever before heard or seen such a thing. The shells passing over my head made one steady hiss. At 10 o'clock to the second the guns stopped, and the whole long line of French infantry, as far as I could see to the north and south, rose up out of their trenches and went forward. The next minute the guns opened again with a barrage. A most wonderful sight. I watched the infantry take all the trenches in sight without too much loss and then at 11 a.m. came away." He went to see Foch, who was "pleased" with the reports he had received.

Actually, the situation was very different from this pleasing

impression except at one part, where it flattered only to deceive. While the other corps were quickly brought to a halt, with murderous losses, Pétain's men swept through the German defences and on for two and a half miles without check. Some parties even reached the crest of Vimy Ridge near Souchez and looked down on the wide Plain of Douai—the "promised land." The rapidity of this advance undoubtedly created the element of surprise that had originally been eschewed. For a few hours there was a chance that the front might crumble, and twenty miles away at Lille, where distance magnified the echoes, the headquarters of Rupprecht's Army Group was even taking steps for a possible removal.

But the French command, because of its new self-dedication to a limited method, was even more taken by surprise. Pétain had kept only a brigade in corps reserve, and the nearest division of the Army Reserve was seven and a half miles distant. Before it could be brought up the Germans had closed the gap, and by the afternoon their counter-attacks began a pressure that won back part of the lost ground. They had the advantage in that, being driven back to the crest of the ridge, they could bring up reserves unobserved. By evening two more divisions had reinforced their original four, and henceforth their strength multiplied far faster than French attacks could reduce them. By May 15th thirteen German divisions were facing the Tenth Army.

Responsibility for the delay in exploiting the momentary opening lies with the army commander d'Urbal, rather than with Foch. But Foch was responsible, under Joffre, for continuing the offensive after opportunity had vanished. With desperate fighting, and growing loss, the French fought their way yard by yard through the shattered villages of Carency and Ablain St. Nazaire, and to the corner of the Plateau of Notre Dame de Lorette—all honeycombed with trenches. But the crest of the ridge hung mockingly above them out of reach. On May 15th a renewed general effort was made, with much loss and no progress. D'Urbal intended to try again next day, but Foch put a check on him, estimating that "eight or ten days' delay would be necessary" before resuming the general attack. Mean-

time local attacks would be made to secure "a base of departure" or starting line.

But in the meantime d'Urbal began to realise the difficulties under which his offensive was labouring. It was now Foch who spurred him on. At a conference on June 5th he gave the judgment that "it was necessary, whatever the cost, to profit by the superiority we now have over the enemy." Any doubts held by d'Urbal promptly disappeared, and, most astonishing of all, he notified the cavalry to be ready to pass through "at full gallop. The time for dismounted cavalry has passed." Thus after some preliminary advances, the final and futile general attack was launched on June 16th, and broken off, tardily, on the 18th, when the French casualties had reached a total of 102,500—rather more than double the defenders' loss. Even so, Foch was reluctant to stop, and only did so because of Joffre's express order.

Poincaré records: "The story which Colonel Pénelon tells me today, in strict confidence, leaves me no illusion whatever as to the Arras operations, which have utterly failed. The thing is over, the casualty list is very heavy, and we are not going to get through; this is the third time that Joffre has made his attempt on too narrow a front. . . ." As consolation he was told that the German losses were "much greater," but, as he truly remarked, "this is very little better than guesswork."

The British attack further north, by Haig's First Army against Aubers Ridge, had differed from the French in retaining the Neuve Chapelle method of a short bombardment—only forty minutes instead of six days. The choice was dictated as much by shortage of ammunition as by desire of surprise. Haig had nine divisions—as well as five cavalry divisions, waiting uselessly in rear—against two German divisions. But the German defences had been much strengthened since Neuve Chapelle. Thus the attack died away quickly from a surfeit of German machine-guns and an insufficiency of British shells—especially heavy shells. The fault was not in the duration of the bombardment, but in its lack of effect—it served merely as a warning gong which told the enemy to man their fire-steps.

Wilson naturally drew a different deduction: "Neither the

I Corps, Indian, nor IV Corps could do anything; we lost some 10,000 men and never gained a yard. Now whose plans were right—Foch or Haig?" But the object could not be measured in yards, as Foch was to learn. Kitchener drew the right deduction when he wrote: "The French have an almost unlimited supply of ammunition, including H.E., and fourteen divisions in reserve, so if they cannot get through we may take it as proved that the lines cannot be forced." They could only be snapped by some form of surprise, as 1918 was to prove.

Strangely, on May 2nd, the Germans had foreshadowed their 1918 method. This was in the Gorlice-Tarnow break-through, which began the dramatic rolling back of the Russian "steam-roller," and continued week by week, month after month, until by the autumn 400,000 men of the Russian Army were sitting in prison-cages, and the remainder were standing far back on Russian soil. The strategic plan had been proposed by Conrad and adopted by Falkenhayn—without acknowledgment. The tactical plan had been devised by Colonel von Seeckt, post-war rebuilders of the German Army, to the popular glorification of Mackensen, his nominal commander. Fourteen divisions were concentrated on the Dunajec against a thirty-mile front held by six Russian divisions, and were launched after four hours' intense bombardment. It is true that the defences on this front were much weaker than in France, but against this must be set the fact that the German guns were spread more thinly. But the real merit, and effect, of the stroke lay in its swiftness of exploitation. This was due to the prompt infusion of reserves, to their disposition in depth, to the principle of reinforcing the successful rather than the held-up units, and to the elasticity of objectives—all of which were inculcated in the tactical plan. Such methods were nearly three years ahead of Western Front practice.

Joffre's conclusion as to the British failure coincided, naturally, with Wilson's. So, apparently, did that of Foch. The consequence was to cause fresh tension between the two Allied Commanders-in-Chief. On May 12th they met at Brias, Foch's battle headquarters, and Joffre complained that the stoppage of the British offensive was allowing the enemy to switch reserves to stop the

French. Sir John French said he would resume the offensive on the 14th at a new point, but "Joffre said this was very late." Sir John French then offered to take over the front held by the French 58th Division on the British right. According to Wilson's diary, "Joffre pointed out that we should be doing very little if we only relieved the 58th Division, and hinted at Government action, which luckily Sir John did not quite catch, and I got the chance of interpreting wrong ; but as both were getting hot, I got Sir John to go away, saying he would send an answer later."

Under this pressure from Joffre and Foch, Haig's attack was renewed in the Festubert sector, continuing from May 16th to 27th, while a further effort was made at Givenchy to assist the final spasm of Foch's offensive on June 16th. In these attacks Haig adopted the French method of prolonged bombardment, followed by limited assaults, a piecemeal method which was handicapped by the limited supply of heavy high-explosive ammunition. It enabled the British to bite off successive small pieces of the German line, but allowed the Germans time to make fresh lines in rear, and despite the small scale of the attacks the British loss reached a total of over 30,000 men.

Sir John French, made sore by French criticism and pressure, relieved his feelings in complaints that he was starved of ammunition, that the needs of the Dardanelles expedition were being met at his expense, and that Kitchener was responsible for his troubles. He used the services of his friend Colonel Repington, the military correspondent of *The Times*, to initiate a Press campaign in which Kitchener became the target. Kitchener could have retorted, with better justification, that the primary fault was French's folly in committing himself to an offensive campaign for which he had not the means, and in making common cause with Joffre against the alternative move where the slender resources that were wasted in France might have sufficed for success.

It is interesting to note that when Poincaré saw Castelnau on the morning of May 9th he discovered that "Castelnau does not think any very important result will be derived, and contrary to the opinion of Joffre he thinks we may have to look for a decision in some other theatre of war, Italy or the Danube." Henry Wilson

saw Castelnau after the offensive and found him "very much opposed to attacks like this at Arras, which cost 100,000 men, and did no good except shatter four corps. . . . He is for big guns, lots of ammunition, deep entrenchments, wait for the English to appear, stop all attacks till some chance of real decision, and so on." Thus even the pre-war high priest of the offensive had come to doubt the faith he had implanted in Joffre, his aforetime dull pupil in strategy. Divisional and corps commanders were the first to appreciate the impossibility—from contact with the enemy. Then the doubt spread backward and upward. Only Foch was left to reinforce by his confidence the Commander-in-Chief's will. Apart from Foch, belief in a break-through was confined to Joffre and his entourage at Chantilly, the post most remote from the front—and so from reality.

Yet plans for a fresh offensive were pursued. How did such a travesty of reason come about? The chain of causation was linked with the chain of subordination, and is an illustration of the unlimited power, whether for weal or woe, that rests in the hierarchic principle.

The aftermath of Arras witnessed an almost universal dejection and disgust, subdued to a whisper among the soldiers, but loudly voiced among politicians and the people. It was even stated in the Senate that two battalions had "gone over to the enemy singing the 'Internationale.'" Early in June Poincaré found that "everyone is complaining about Joffre, and especially about his entourage." Clemenceau declared that "if things go on as they are, there will be a revolt of the generals against the High Command." He and others brought "violent indictments against the General Staff" in the Parliamentary Army Committee. Its president, "in despair of being able to calm these turbulent spirits, weeps to himself every evening when he goes home." A letter from a corps commander was read out which said that "the troops had lost their dash and had lapsed into a gloomy sort of resignation."

Poincaré himself received a daily growing crop of letters that urged negotiations for peace. When he went to Arras early in July, the commander of the IX Corps boldly entreated him:

"Pray, Monsieur le Président, do what you can to put a stop to these local offensives; the instrument of victory is being broken in our hands." When he passed on to the other five corps that had shared in the offensive, "all the commanders, with little variation, voiced the same opinion." On the other hand, the army commander "by no means agreed with them; his rather lofty idea was that if the troops are having so grievous a time where they are, they should be pushed on up to the crest." "One again gets the impression of profound disagreement between the man who sets the task and the subordinates who have to execute it."

Pétain, the one man who had emerged with fresh laurels, frankly disputed the idea that a decisive victory had been narrowly missed. He added that the offensive had, rather, proved anew the error of "starting an offensive without sufficiently consulting those who have to carry it out."

In face of this volume of discontent, Joffre was driven to make concessions. He agreed to give eight days' leave to all ranks. He took a new Chief-of-Staff, Pellé, who was dismayed on taking over "to see such a gulf between G.Q.G. and the fighting line." To meet the charge that he shut himself off from his subordinates, and did not heed their opinion, Joffre promised to give his Army Group Commanders more freedom, handed over charge of the Centre Group to Castelnau, and arranged to hold conferences of the three with himself. It is worth note that Castelnau welcomed the idea of these conferences, while Foch deprecated it. Obviously, it tended to augment Castelnau's influence and to modify Foch's hitherto unique position as Joffre's right hand. When Castelnau expressed his opinion that the corps that had taken part in the Arras offensive needed a long rest, Foch "said excitedly that two or three weeks would be sufficient."

But it is equally significant to note the effect on Castelnau of advancement to this new position and influence in counsel. He no longer urged the necessity of seeking an alternative theatre of operations. And when the conference discussed Kitchener's arguments in favour of standing on the defensive until British man-power and munitions had reached full tide, Castelnau tacitly

agreed with the others in their denunciation of "Kitchener's theory as heresy." Their common argument was: "Kitchener can pronounce at his ease as he has no invaded provinces to liberate." It revealed a curious subordination of combined strategy to single patriotism, and of practical to sentimental questions. Thus, very naturally, "there was a consensus of opinion that there must be one directing brain, and that that brain could only be in France." With amusing naïveté it was remarked that "unfortunately the Allies do not seem to see this in the same light." Joffre's remedy was that "the French Government might propose to the Allied Powers to centralise the supreme control of the war in the French G.Q.G., where concerted plans and instructions for operations might be worked out."

The most apt comment on G.Q.G.'s past qualification for such control was Castelnau's: "At present we have no plan, and we are rather like a cockchafer in a glass case; we keep on putting our head out right and left haphazard." This comment was made, however, not at Chantilly, but back in his own headquarters after his return! One suspects that Joffre, in appointing Castelnau, had shrewdly gauged the power of promotion as a gag.

Herein we have a clue to Joffre's success, logically astonishing, in riveting his plan for a fresh offensive on an army that had little or no belief in its success. Even Foch, while still giving loyal support to Joffre, had been brought by hard experience to reason and to doubt. When Poincaré visited his front early in July, Foch came to dinner: "He was vivacious, outspoken, and spicy in his talk as ever, but he seemed to me rather to have changed his outlook. He no longer talks about offensives, but now says that the war will be long, indeed very long, and that we must exercise patience and dig ourselves in solidly." And later in the month Poincaré learnt from Pénélon that "no single general, not excepting Foch, has any more faith in an offensive proving successful, and the Commander-in-Chief is very unhappy about this." Yet plans still went forward.

Joffre's immediate concern was to secure British resources in aid of his offensive. He wanted the bulk of the New Armies sent

to France, and became, so Poincaré relates, "very disgruntled with the English" when he found that they shared the doubts of his generals. Kitchener pertinently remarked: "Joffre and Sir John told me in November that they were going to push the Germans back over the frontier; they gave me the same assurances in December, March, and May. What have they done? The attacks are very costly and end in nothing." But Joffre, who had scoffed at Kitchener's earlier fears of a Russian defeat, now made the actuality an argument for his renewed offensive, and by its leverage succeeded in shifting the weight of the New Armies on to French soil. He was not willing, however, to delay his offensive until it was there.

He kept his designs hidden from his own Government until August, and only revealed them fully when, with apprehension quickened by a vague hint, the Government asked for an explanation of his purpose. He then adduced the necessity of helping Russia, but was told that "questions of alliance" were for the Government to decide, and that he must only look at the problem "from the strategic point of view." Thereupon he shifted his ground and declared that "from purely military considerations it was necessary to keep his troops employed, as otherwise they would deteriorate physically and morally." The Government's acceptance of such a pretext, after the evidence they had received of the moral and physical exhaustion caused by the previous offensives, would be incredible—if it was not a fact.

Their weak surrender was the more astonishing because in June they had practically come to a decision in concert with the British Government to postpone any further offensive in France until 1916, while making an effort with strengthened forces to attain success at the Dardanelles. There, the landing on April 25th, although made against a forewarned enemy and with a mere five divisions against six, had but narrowly missed success. When, after the capture of the beaches, the opportunity of exploitation was lost through a chain of blunders and accidents, stalemate set in. Belatedly in July the British Government decided to send reinforcements, which brought the strength of the expedition to twelve divisions. By the time they arrived the Turkish strength

on the Gallipoli peninsula had also risen—to fifteen divisions. Still more belatedly the French Government decided to augment their share of the expedition.

Its decision was prompted as much by personal as by strategic considerations. Sarrail, commanding the Third Army at Verdun, was blamed for the abortive July attack in the Argonne. Joffre ordered an enquiry to be made by Dubail, not merely into the conduct of the attack, but also into Sarrail's general conduct. Following his report—a document that has mysteriously been lost—Sarrail was removed. He had been a very outspoken critic of Joffre's strategy.

But Sarrail was a strong Radical, and his political friends rallied to his side. With obvious justice they pointed out that no one had been penalised for the far greater failure at Arras. Joffre could not afford to raise a fresh storm against his régime. He conveyed a tactful hint that he would like Sarrail to be given the command at the Dardanelles, and the Government thankfully adopted this solution. To coat the pill they gave Sarrail a hint that the size of the command would be increased. It has been commonly said, and the insinuation is made in Wilson's diary as coming from Joffre's staff, that Sarrail intrigued for this increase as an increase of his own dignity. But, actually, it was urged by the previous commander, Gouraud, who had come home wounded, and the Government had agreed upon it. Their desire to translate this agreement into action was, however, undoubtedly stimulated by their desire to conciliate Sarrail and his political friends. They asked Joffre to spare four divisions as a reinforcement. Kitchener, on hearing their decision, proposed that two British divisions should also be sent from France. Wilson was horrified: "This is all appalling."

Thus Joffre found that his hint had become a boomerang. But he was equal to the emergency. He flatly told his Government that he could not and would not spare the troops at the moment, but as a sop said that if he did not "get through" in September, he would release them. We learn from Wilson's diary that he hit on the happy ruse of declaring that he found Sarrail's scheme too "sketchy" and proposing that Sarrail

should go out and study the problem on the spot. "This gets rid of Sarrail rather neatly! So the whole thing falls down. . . ." For it was shrewdly calculated that if the reinforcement to the Dardanelles could be postponed until after Joffre's offensive, "the October winds down there" would prevent it being sent at all. We learn also from Wilson that Joffre hurried to Italy to persuade Cadorna "on no account to send men to the Dardanelles." In this honourable way did the Commander-in-Chief frustrate his own Government. Finally, on September 11th, Joffre and French met Kitchener at Calais and, with their tongues in their checks, "agreed to send four French and two British divisions to the Dardanelles if and when the great attack failed."

Meantime, at the Dardanelles, Ian Hamilton had used his partial reinforcement of raw troops for a second and, as it proved, last attempt. He achieved surprise, but again narrowly missed success. Meantime, also, the enemy powers were gathering their forces to overwhelm Serbia; Bulgaria was arranging to enter the war on their side and stab Serbia in the back; Greece was turning away from the Allies; Russia's munition-starved forces were reeling back under fresh blows that they could not counter. As a result of these fresh disasters, the Tsar was adding another by taking into his own hands the command-in-chief. And, at the same time, Hoffmann, the guiding brain of the enemy's most dangerous moves, was saying that the success of the German efforts against Russia depended on keeping "the Dardanelles firmly closed." Hoffmann also made a self-consoling note in his diary: "When one gets a close view of influential people—their bad relations with each other, their conflicting ambitions, one must always bear in mind that it is certainly much worse on the other side among the French, English and Russians." His intuition was all too true.

Whilst Joffre and French were agreed, and only agreed, in resisting any removal of troops from France, they disagreed more and more over the action to be taken in France.

Joffre's plan for the autumn offensive was to strike again in Artois, and almost simultaneously in Champagne—if he could provide sufficient forces. The idea of a dual thrust was certainly

better than a single one, especially when aimed at the sides of a salient. For by cutting through the flank sectors the central part might collapse. But the sectors he chose were much too far apart to have an immediate reaction on each other. Joffre, however, thought differently. A break-through in these two sectors was to be followed by a general offensive of all the armies, which "would compel the Germans to retreat beyond the Meuse and possibly end the war." As originally intended, the offensive in Artois was to be the main stroke. Yet, in the event, 5 German divisions sufficed to quench Foch's attack between Arras and Lens, made with 14 divisions, while $1\frac{1}{2}$ German divisions broke the back of the attack further north by 6 British divisions. What a gulf between conception and execution!

As early as June 4th Joffre had sent his draft plan to French, asking that the British should assist in two ways: first, by taking over the front south of Arras held by Pétain's Second Army;* second, by taking part in Foch's offensive and attacking either on the north or the south flank of d'Urbal's army. French expressed his general agreement with this scheme, and said that he would strike on the north flank, between Lens and La Bassée.

Then a strong gust of common sense came from the man who would have to carry it out, Haig, and the military weather-vane swung the other way. Haig argued that the supply of heavy guns and shells was still inadequate, that its inadequacy was the governing factor in the problem, and that until the deficiency was remedied, it was little use to make plans for the offensive. Further, he had made a personal reconnaissance of the proposed area and found that "it was not a favourable one for attack." If an offensive was imperative, he suggested that the main British attack should take place north of La Bassée.

His doubts were endorsed by Robertson, but Robertson's influence with French had been undermined by Wilson, who was still a devout believer in the superiority of French military judgment. Robertson had even been excluded from French's personal

* In August the newly formed British Third Army took over a fifteen-mile front from the Somme northward to Hébuterne. Joffre had desired the British to extend a further seven miles south of the river.

mess. Meantime the chief's trusted friend and *confidant* was proposing to Foch that the British Army should be divided into two Groups, "one where we are, and one away in Argonne or Vosges. Foch much pleased." Wilson then carried his proposal to Kitchener and pointed out the advantage: "less power for Sir John, less jealousy by the French, rivalry of the two groups throwing them into the arms of the French." Wilson had certainly done his best to ensure the last point.

Joffre would accept no arguments for a postponement of the site or a change of site. He even remarked, with a magisterial infallibility that is delightful in retrospect, but in retrospect only, that "your attack will find particularly favourable ground between Loos and La Bassée." Haig held to his view, based on eyesight. French was inclined to think that "Haig exaggerated the difficulties"; and even after a long-range look at the ground from Notre Dame de Lorette he still considered that it afforded "many advantages." But later in July he changed his mind, his doubts accentuated by news of stinted munitions from England and of unstinted work on the German defences—now strengthened by a second system in rear.

Hence a conference was arranged to take place on July 27th at Frévent, which had become Foch's headquarters. Wilson relates that "Sir John put out his reasons for not attacking on left of the French. Foch answered and in my judgment completely upset Sir John. Concentration, not dispersion, continuous and prolonged effort in one direction and for one purpose (say the heights overlooking the plain of Douai). All parts of the line equally strong." Here was surely a curious rejection by Foch of his own pre-war teaching. More characteristic by now was his disregard of the conditions of ground and fortification. On the other hand, it is just to add that he proposed to leave a gap in the attack opposite the maze-like mining town of Lens, and to recognise that experience supported his argument that a distant British attack would not have an immediate reaction on his own. "Sir John told me Foch had convinced him, but that both Haig and Robertson would oppose him heavily; still he would attack down near the French."

French may have been momentarily convinced on detail, but he had lost faith in the plan as a whole, and in the idea of taking the offensive. After a protest to Joffre, which only drew a strong endorsement of Foch's argument, French certainly promised that he "would direct the movements of the British Army in accordance with the wishes that you as Generalissimo expressed." Despite this assurance, he sought a way out through a project of co-operating by artillery fire alone. He intended to wait until the French attack had absorbed the enemy's attention before launching his infantry.

This way out was blocked first by Wilson and then by Kitchener. On discovering his chief's intention, Wilson promptly sent word to Pellé, whereupon Joffre wrote a strong letter to French, saying that he expected him to attack with all his forces, and wished him to settle details with Foch. French, still eager in evasion, had a reply drafted that "he would assist according to ammunition." Wilson at once rushed to see Foch, who, "when I told him the whole story, was quite open about the deplorable effect if we don't fight. . . . Sir John had better walk warily."

Joffre, perhaps remembering 1914, sent Kitchener a pressing invitation to visit the French Army. He came on August 16th and was met by Joffre, Foch, and Wilson, who kept him close company. He was paid all possible honours. After Joffre had appealed to him, Wilson sought to frighten him with tales that the French politicians were trying to displace Joffre as a preliminary to seeking peace, and urged on him "the absolute necessity of our doing nothing to upset the French soldiers, such as Sir John not putting his back in the forthcoming attack, etc. He told me he quite agreed and would speak to Sir John. A good day's work on Kitchener's part."

The sequel was that Kitchener told French that "we must act with all energy and do our utmost to help France in this offensive, even though by so doing we may suffer very heavy losses." As a further assurance he agreed to a formula, drawn up by Joffre, which gave Joffre greater control over French.

In this reversal of his previous attitude, Kitchener was apparently influenced by the news of Russia's latest defeats. But

two blacks do not make a white, and as he had so often declared his belief that the Western Front was impassable, it is difficult to see how he could feel that a hopeless offensive there could bring fresh hope to the Russians.

The date of the offensive, originally fixed for September 7th, was postponed until the 25th, because the French preparations were not complete. On September 14th Joffre gave a final explanation of his plans at a conference at Chantilly, attended by the three Army Group Commanders and by French. Joffre declared that the time was "particularly favourable for a general offensive," and expressed his "confidence in a great and possibly complete victory." The simultaneous attacks were "a certain guarantee of success." But one important change from his original plan had been made. This was Joffre's decision, taken in July, to make the Champagne attack, and not the Artois, his main attack, for the reason that Vimy Ridge had not yet been captured, while in Champagne there were fewer obstacles or villages in the way of the attackers. This sudden regard for ground was in significant contrast to his view where the British attack was concerned. And the weakening of the French stroke in Artois had a damaging influence on the prospects of Haig's attack.

To Castelnau's attack in Champagne 34 divisions were allotted, 27 being for the main attack by Pétain's Second Army on an eighteen-mile frontage east of Reims and the remainder for a subsidiary stroke by Langle de Cary's Fourth Army west of Rheims. In contrast, only 17 divisions were available for Foch's attack on a twelve-mile frontage. Haig, for his attack on a six-mile frontage, had 6 divisions, although 3 more were kept in general reserve under French. Joffre had insisted that these should be put at Haig's disposal before the offensive, lest they should be too late to exploit a success, but French disregarded this advice—that was virtually an order, and so the more objectionable in French's ears.

A greater disparity between the attacks was in the proportion of heavy guns. While Pétain had 850 and Foch had 420, Haig had only 114—barely half as many to the mile as Foch, and a

mere two-fifths of Pétain's scale. To balance this disproportion Haig had gas, but this, being then discharged from cylinders, was dependent on a favourable wind. And it played him false.

The general plan of the offensive definitely subordinated the surprise of the enemy to the destruction of the enemy's defences.* The assault was preceded and prepared by a deliberate bombardment lasting four days and nights. But the attack itself was again to aim at a swift break-through. In theory, an irresistible tide of infantry, many waves deep, would sweep over and through the shell-shattered trenches.

After his prolonged earlier experience Foch seems to have lost some of his confidence in this method and aim. For in a memorandum of July 19th to Joffre he expressed doubts of a break-through, suggested an advance by limited stages, and spoke of the need for surprise. It is not easy to tell how deep was his conviction. For when d'Urbal proposed a methodical attack in three phases Foch overruled his wish and directed him, on September 4th, to carry out the three phases simultaneously—"to aim beyond a mere tactical success at a strategic break-through capable of producing decisive results, and to push the main body of his troops rapidly towards Douai."

It may be that he adopted this "impulsive" attitude merely in deference and loyalty to Joffre. On the other hand, his July memorandum may have been dictated largely in reaction from his disappointment that Joffre preferred Champagne to Artois for the main thrust; if so, it would be in accord with his character that his confidence and horizon should grow as the hour of attack drew nigh.

So did Haig's—in his case encouraged by a too successful gas demonstration. He made, however, the wise proviso that "under no circumstances should our attack be launched without the aid of gas." He was overruled because of the need of supporting Foch's attack, but as a compromise he arranged with French that he would only launch two of his divisions if, at the last moment, gas could not be used. Another question left indefinite, owing

* A week before the offensive the French Ambassador in Rome reported that its delivery was a subject of general gossip.

to the difficulty of reconciling Foch's and French's desires, was the hour of the assault. While French wished to attack as early as possible in the morning, Foch wished to carry out the final four hours of his bombardment in a good light. In the outcome this precaution recoiled on the British without benefiting the French.

At Haig's headquarters the last night was a time of tense anxiety and intense study of meteorological reports. These had "a slight bias towards favourable," and at 9 p.m. Haig ordered the full-scale attack with gas, although making arrangements for last-minute cancellation if necessary. During the hours of darkness the wind dropped almost to a calm. Haig went out as soon as it was light. After watching the slow drift of smoke-puffs from a cigarette, he gave the order to "carry on." But the improvement was delusive, and a few minutes later one of his staff telephoned to the I Corps to ask whether it was possible to stop the discharge and the attack. He was told, perhaps too impulsively, that it was too late.

The gas was turned on at 5.50 a.m., and forty minutes later the infantry were launched. On the British left the gas was a failure, some drifting back, and helped to smother the attack. On the right, one division, the 15th, made so deep a penetration that the German command, in momentary alarm, prepared to evacuate the whole area. The other divisions, however, were less successful, and soon forfeited opportunities through bad judgment. Worse still was the judgment shown in the use of the general reserve, which, despite the remonstrances of both Haig and Foch, was placed sixteen miles in rear by French and handed over to Haig too late. Thus the narrow crack was soon cemented by the enemy.

The ineffectiveness of the larger French attack further south also affected the British opportunity. The French infantry did not advance until 12.45 p.m., six and a quarter hours after their allies, and then made little progress where they did not make merely a demonstration. On the right and centre the attack was an almost complete failure; even where the attackers reached the enemy front line they were soon evicted in most places. The left wing

had more success, gaining part of its first objective, but too slight to have a reaction on the British prospects. The bitter experiences of the spring and summer seem to have led the fighting commanders to discount Foch's assurance of a break-through, and to amend his vehement order by gentle evasion.

Foch, however, with undaunted optimism, if also in loyalty to his allies, determined to renew the attack. In the evening he gave d'Urbal orders to make his "principal effort on the left," while suspending the attack altogether on the right. Foch then went off to Lillers to see French, who was equally intent on pursuing the now fading gleam of success and of using the reserve that should have been used earlier. Thus at 11 p.m. Foch sent a report to Joffre which stated that "the happy situation of our left, combined with the British advantage, allows us to hope that we shall reach" the crest of Vimy Ridge.

But on his return to his own headquarters he seems to have heard facts that induced a more realistic view. For early next morning he ordered d'Urbal not to attack until "he had re-established order in his divisions, and relieved those which had suffered most heavily." Not until noon did the French attacks begin again; the extreme left advanced half a mile, but elsewhere nothing was achieved. One corps, which had been completely checked, sent a false report that its troops had advanced a mile, whereupon with amazing faith a cavalry brigade was ordered up "for the pursuit."

Meantime a brake had been put on Foch from above. At 10 a.m. Joffre had told him on the telephone to "act discreetly," saying: "We must not think of forcing the crest of Vimy Ridge." A little later he summoned Foch to see him near Amiens, and there ordered him to "stop the attacks of the Tenth Army, taking care to avoid giving the British the impression that we are leaving them to attack alone, or the Germans that our offensive is slackening off. Economise ammunition."

Joffre's reason was not merely that he doubted the chances of the Artois attack, but that he was now pinning his hopes to the Champagne attack, which on the first day gave a delusive promise of a break-through. The delusion was largely caused by the

Germans' cleverness in making their principal defence on their second position, whither they withdrew most of their artillery, thus initiating the method of elastic defence which was eventually turned against them by Pétain in 1918.

On September 25th, in consequence, the French broke through the first position and in two places came within reach of the second, taking 14,000 prisoners, although at heavy cost. Next day the second position was reached on a seven-mile frontage, but only one small and temporary lodgment was made. Castelnau and his two army commanders had each said originally that if the front was not broken through at the first blow the attempt would fail, but, characteristically, all save Pétain were now unwilling to accept their own conclusion. Castelnau overruled Pétain, and three more days of desperate fighting followed before Joffre at last called a halt. The most fantastic feature of the plan had been the moving up of eight cavalry divisions, with instructions to make "a relentless pursuit without waiting for the infantry," and with the frontier as their objective.

In Artois, Foch, on returning from his visit to Joffre, passed on the order to economise ammunition. On the 27th only his two left corps, nearest the British, made a perceptible attempt to attack, and they made imperceptible progress. That night French protested to Joffre that his reserves were becoming exhausted and his right was exposed; unless d'Urbal attacked vigorously and without delay he would be forced to abandon his offensive. In his diary French wrote: "The advance of the Tenth French Army is very slow and decidedly disappointing." Joffre told Foch to come to an understanding with French. Next morning Foch went to see him and was greeted with sharp complaints. French declared that if he was Commander-in-Chief on the whole front he would "put every available man in" just north of Loos and "rush" the German second position. "I should feel quite confident of success."

Foch concealed his hurt surprise at French's bitter tone, and pretended to agree "in principle" with French's fantastic idea. But he pointed out that the area was rather small to crowd in such large forces and to organise a combined Franco-British

attack, suggesting that to do so would only increase the losses. Instead, he offered to relieve French's extreme right division, so providing him with a reserve of his own. French accepted.

That afternoon the French attack was resumed, and one division actually reached the crest of Vimy Ridge, a success that led the Germans to divert most of the newly arrived *Guard Corps* from the British front to that sector. But the other French divisions had achieved little, the weather was very bad, and d'Urbal reported that he was unable to renew the attack for several days. So on the morning of the 29th Foch came again to see French. He now offered to take over still more of French's front, as far as Hill 70 beyond Loos, and join with him in a "shoulder-to-shoulder" offensive, to begin on October 2nd. This was agreed upon. The offensive in Champagne was to be renewed similarly.

As this pause was to be followed by a renewal at the same points, it gave the enemy time to strengthen their defences and to bring up reserves. No one seems to have suggested that the point of attack might be shifted to a sector where the reserves were thin.

Bad weather, slow movements, the exhaustion of the troops, and the enemy's counter-attacks now intervened to cause repeated postponements. While Joffre, Foch, and French were urging haste and complaining of each other, the executive army commanders met many practical difficulties in carrying out their superiors' instructions, and in some cases simply disregarded them.

The Champagne attack was resumed first and collapsed first, having practically exhausted its shell supply before the infantry were launched. In Artois, a violent German attack on the 8th upset Haig's gas preparations, and led him to postpone his attack until the 13th. Foch thereupon decided not to wait any longer, reduced his part in the combined attack to a mere artillery demonstration, and launched his stroke against the crest of Vimy Ridge on the 11th. It failed with the loss of another couple of thousand men. Foch ascribed the failure to indifferent artillery preparation, and decided on yet another push, arguing that his

troops were "within a bound" of the crest and could not afford to leave it in the enemy's hands during the winter.

Joffre, however, decided that he could not afford the cost of trying to reach it. Overruling Foch, he brought his offensive to a belated end. Haig's attempt on the 13th was equally futile. In the words of the official history, "it had not improved the general situation in any way, and had brought nothing but useless slaughter of infantry." The British casualties already had risen to a total of 50,380—or 60,392 including Haig's subsidiary attacks—whereas the German loss was barely 20,000. Foch's casualties were 48,000 and Castelnau's 143,000, while their German opponents had lost some 120,000. That the proportion of casualties suffered to casualties inflicted was rather lower for the French than for the British suggests the benefit of more heavy artillery, if it also suggests more discretion in the handling of the attacks.

While Joffre had thus again been occupied in proving his theory wrong, at a cost of a quarter of a million men, Bulgaria had mobilised against Serbia. On October 7th the Austro-German forces had begun the invasion of Serbia, followed a week later by the Bulgarians. Greece had refused to go to Serbia's aid. In default of the divisions which Joffre had withheld, two were taken from Gallipoli and sent to Salonika—too late to avert Serbia's collapse. Even now, his own offensive over, Joffre strove to wriggle out of his promise, and in the end sent only two of the four. For he was actually proposing a fresh offensive in Alsace. But he had come round, all too late, to the view that help must be sent to the Balkans, and was willing to spare some—British divisions. It would seem that this concession, at second-hand, was hastened by Kitchener's blunt remark: "The more troops I give you, the more you say you want, and the more you keep your own hand tightly on them. If you are so jealous on this point, I shall be obliged to be more cautious as to sending you our people, but shall keep them to allocate where I think necessary."

Joffre became willing to spare some British divisions, with the idea that they would subsequently be replaced from England.

But French, whose command would be the immediate sufferer, now became the chief obstructionist. In his diary he dismissed the Balkan danger with the remark: "No good can possibly come by weakening the troops here, which must always be the principal theatre, and where alone we can *meet* and kill Germans!" But his protest was overridden by the exertions of Joffre, who now, at the end of October, when Serbia was almost crushed, went over to London and there, by the weight of his influence, persuaded the Government to lock up forces in Salonika—truly a case of locking the stable door when the horse has gone.

Wilson's acrobatic reactions to the French change of attitude lent a turn of farce to the tragedy. He had just been declaring that the Salonika expedition was "much against Joffre's wishes"; that "the whole of the Salonika business is political, and as usual the fools at home—Asquith, Grey, K.—have been taken in." Then he received letters from his War Office friends which "accuse the French and Joffre of having let us in over Salonika." Unable to believe it, he paid a flying visit to Joffre's headquarters, where he found that the incredible was true. But he had no difficulty in performing a somersault. "Joffre is in favour of sending the 150,000; we are backing out. . . . I told him I had grave reasons for thinking we were not going to send a man to Salonika, and that if we sent anybody anywhere it would be to Gallipoli. He said our strategists were fools. I told him I cordially agreed with him." After a call on Foch "to tell him all our gossip, which he loves," Wilson arrived back at St. Omer and "wrote a long letter describing Joffre's position, and how I agreed with him as regards the necessity of saving Serbia. . . ." But the agreement was a little late, the expedition was later, and the help arrived too late to save Serbia.

Joffre's curious reversal of attitude and pressure seems to have been impelled by a feeling of personal insecurity, if a still deeper motive was also maturing. On October 9th Pénélon had told Poincaré: "Joffre will not listen to anybody and turns down any plan which the 3rd [Operations] Bureau has submitted to him, and the officers there are very sore and will go if Joffre remains without somebody like Castelnau being with him. I am saying

this to you on behalf of all my colleagues." Poincaré made the note: "Pénélon is usually so discreet and so correct that things must be very wrong at G.Q.G. for him to speak like this."

Yet the ironical result of the double disaster—in France and the Balkans—was not the removal of Joffre, but the fall of the Government. Perhaps it deserved its fate for its weak surrender to his repeated and repeatedly unfounded assurances. With equal irony, if with ample justification, the one commander to suffer as a result of the offensive was Sir John French, unwilling tool of Joffre's ambitions. He was removed from the command of the British forces and replaced by Haig.

Under cover of Joffre's benign cloak Foch also avoided penalty, if he did not escape criticism. The shadow of disgrace was not to fall across his radiant confidence until another year had passed, a year in which he showed that he had drawn some profit from his 1915 experience, and caused less vain expenditure of life. For Foch, the personal tragedy of 1915 has been aptly expressed by Mayer: "Foch had been called on to conduct a siege warfare, the type of warfare most contrary to his nature, to his impulsive spirit, to his qualities of intrepid confidence, to his love of risk."

His outlook had certainly become more sober by the end of the year, and in this time of disillusionment he seems to have questioned the truth of his theory of war. Poincaré, meeting him on October 25th, noted: "He seemed today rather restless, like a thoroughbred horse pulling at his bridle. He no longer believes in crushing the enemy's defences and thinks we shall need all our resources alike of industry and diplomacy; only, when the hour comes, he hopes that by heavy pressure on a well-selected point we may make the enemy's front begin to give way, and then, by a series of well and methodically prepared attacks, overcome the mighty obstacle and pass through."

The reason of this visit was to present to Foch the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour. According to the words of the Official Gazette, "he had shown in all circumstances since the opening of the campaign, in the defensive as in the offensive, unparalleled aptitude." In the peculiar inappropriateness of the phrase we may discern the difference between truth and official

truth. More justified was the supplementary reason that he had "contributed greatly to the perfect co-ordination of the efforts of the Allied armies, and has thus rendered the most eminent services to his country." Here again, however, the adjective "perfect" was equally inaccurate.

On November 10th he submitted his report on the past operations and gave his considered views as to the future. "The campaign of 1915 did not accomplish any results, because we did not have enough artillery ammunition." The opening was certainly frank, but the excuse was only a part of the truth. Moreover, in so far as it was true it was a self-condemnation of his judgment and of his zeal for the offensive. After advocating that trench-mortars should be developed, and saying that gas shells and projectors were at present ineffective, he continued: "In our attacks across ground fortified in depth we must above all spare our infantry, in order that it may last through the time inevitably necessary for the battle to be completed." "After artillery, call chemistry to our aid." This emphasis on economy of life marked an advance in his views, and sounded a note that had been missing from his pre-war teaching.

Next he turned to the question of method: "The succession of obstacles which an offensive encounters in its advance leads inevitably to a succession of attacks . . . a series of efforts following each other as closely as possible. We must give up the idea of an assault undertaken with more or less deep and dense masses, the reserves following closely on the heels of the first line, and with the idea of carrying at a single bound a whole series of obstacles. This method has never succeeded." Yet the idea he here abandoned was to be taken up and carried through by the Germans in 1918—because they prepared the way through surprise.

Foch, instead, had become a more convinced advocate of a material preparation—by fire. "*It is a fact that the infantry attack always halts and fails at that point where the preparation has not been sufficient.* Once more we see that the power of organisation is stronger than the bravery of the troops." On Foch's lips "once more" has a strange echo.

In a further memorandum on December 6th Foch amplified his deductions. "The offensive draws its strength :

"(1) From its power of destruction (artillery, gas). . . .

"(2) From its ability to renew promptly its successive action against each succeeding line. Destruction, repetition ; these are its essential characteristics. The one sought for and therefore to be reinforced ; the other forced upon us and therefore to be abridged."

Neatly said, and true, yet with a significant omission to mention surprise or the psychological factors.

On January 21st, 1916, he defined the new method of attack even better, and with more emphasis on economy. "In short, it is a series of successive acts, each necessitating a great quantity of artillery and very little infantry. This form of attack applied in the battle of the future opens up the possibility of wide and repeated offensives, provided we have at our disposal many guns and much ammunition." The reference to "wide," if it is to be read in the sense not merely of width but of widespread points of attack, casts a promising beam of light ahead—towards the autumn of 1918.

Chapter XIV

1916—THE CREEPING SHADOW

THE close of 1915 brought a slight but significant change in Foch's position. This change had an indirect cause. Dissatisfaction with Joffre's conduct of the campaign had led, paradoxically, to an enlargement of Joffre's powers. He was given supreme command of all the French forces, not merely those in France. If this step was in part due to a general desire for a unified direction of the French and Allied strategy, it was also the outcome of a special desire to put a check on Joffre. His critics among the staff of the army encouraged the idea of widening his share of responsibility on the calculation that he would be forced to accept the appointment of "a real Chief of Staff," to assist him in name and control him in fact. The advocates of the Balkan plan saw in the idea a lever to loosen resistance to their plan, calculating that when the Balkan theatre was nominally under Joffre's command he would no longer oppose the dispatch of forces thither. Joffre himself welcomed the idea as an aggrandisement of his authority, and as a means of confining the Balkan plan to a subsidiary and limited rôle.

For Galliéni, the most authoritative sponsor of the plan, had just been summoned to be Minister of War in the new Government. What a turning of the tables ! What a chance for revenge ! Joffre was acutely sensitive to such a danger. Only a few weeks before, Joffre had issued a belated *citation* of Galliéni's contribution to the Marne, a citation so *diminuendo* that it could only have been intended to dam by faint praise the rising tide of public recognition of Galliéni's share in the victory. Its slighting phrases had caused widespread indignation and given the recipient deep

offence. And then, by a dramatic turn of fortune's wheel, the man under whose orders Joffre had been in Madagascar could once more give him orders—from Paris.

When so many voices were clamant for Joffre's dismissal, Galliéni had only to speak the word of endorsement for Joffre's fall to become fact and his own revenge complete. Instead, he refused to turn his new power against the man whose jealousy had previously withdrawn all power from him. Deeming that Joffre's legendary prestige was an inter-Allied asset not lightly to be discarded, he approved the extension of Joffre's authority to include all theatres of war, while supporting the appointment of Castelnau to be Chief of the General Staff in order to enable a nimbler brain to influence the operations. Castelnau had recently opposed the suggested winter offensive in Alsace, urging that the French armies should sit tight until their resources had grown, and saying, "We must make war commercially; there is a big grocer's bill to be reckoned with." His attitude appealed to Galliéni, who regarded his own task as being primarily that of developing the output of munitions and the material strength necessary for a sustained offensive. Auxiliary to this was Galliéni's aim of reforming the high command, so that the use of the new resources should be better directed.

So Castelnau went to Chantilly in his new rôle, and from Chantilly were banished a few of the more suspect instigators of the 1915 strategy. Castelnau's appointment inevitably affected the official position of Foch *vis-à-vis* the Commander-in-Chief, confining him more strictly to his rôle as commander of the northern group of armies. More ominously still, Joffre promised that he would probably place Castelnau in direct charge of the next offensive. By a coincidence of fortune, Henry Wilson at the same time lost his power to influence the relations of the British to the French command, being relegated on Haig's accession to the narrow sphere of a corps commander.

The limitation of Wilson's influence was more definite than that of Foch, who still retained the confidence of Joffre more fully than any other among the French generals. By elevation Castelnau had become the potential rival. Joffre's ever zealous

and jealous entourage took pains to nullify Castelnau's influence by ignoring his presence at Chantilly.

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The importance of Foch's rôle in 1916 would be diminished, but principally owing to the intervention of the Germans.

At the close of 1915 the first serious effort for unity of action among the Allies was made, and on December 6th an inter-Allied military conference assembled at Chantilly under Joffre's presidency. After making the astonishing claim that the autumn offensive had brought "brilliant tactical results," Joffre unfolded his plan for 1916 to the Allied commanders or their representatives. It was a plan traced in somewhat vague outline. France, Britain, Russia, and Italy were to "carry on combined offensives simultaneously with the maximum possible forces on their respective fronts." So far as the French were concerned it was essential that "the Higher Command must have no anxiety as regards ammunition," and for this reason the offensive could not be undertaken for three months or more. It was recognised also that the new British forces would require time for training, and Russia time for re-equipment.

The chief outcome of the conference was to ensure a greater concentration of effort and force in France at the expense of other theatres. The conference was "unanimous in demanding" the "immediate and complete evacuation of Gallipoli." This evacuation, duly carried out within a few weeks, fulfilled the desire of the British General Staff, which adopted as a "ruling principle . . . to place every possible division in France. . . ." This "principle" became the ruling idea in the mind of Robertson, who, on Haig's appointment to the command in France, was sent to be Chief of the General Staff at home. A man pedantic in theory but shrewdly practical in detail, who had risen from the ranks to high position by dogged perseverance and a talent for destructive criticism of detail, his service in France had naturally riveted on his mind the Continental formulas of war that had become the vogue at the Staff College between 1870 and 1914.

In strait fidelity to these formulas the British General Staff

wished to evacuate Salonika as well as Gallipoli, but the French and Russian Governments insisted that the Allied contingent, now raised to eight divisions, should remain there in order to prevent Greece and Rumania being induced or compelled to throw in their lot with the Germanic alliance. In throwing his decisive weight into the scales against the more academic British military opinion, Joffre did not contemplate Salonika as more than a means to reduce the German bulk by external friction. He gave no support to the plan proposed by Alexiev, who had become the director of Russia's strategy when the Tsar, displacing the Grand Duke Nicholas, had assumed direct command of the Russian Armies. Alexiev's plan was that an Anglo-French army of ten corps should move up the Danube and converge on Budapest in concert with a similar-sized Russian force, while the Italians struck for Vienna as soon as this leverage on the Austrian rear took effect. This project was to be realised, but without Russia's aid, in the autumn of 1918.

On the eve of the New Year the plan of campaign in France became more defined. Joffre sent the new British commander proposals for a great combined offensive on a sixty-mile front astride the Somme, from Lassigny to Arras. He told Haig that Foch had been ordered to make a study of a potential offensive south of the Somme, and asked him for his views as to a co-operating British attack north of the river.

Taking advantage of the impulse to unity given by the Chantilly conference, Joffre sought to exercise more direct control over Haig than he had attempted with French, treating Haig as one of his army group commanders rather than as a co-equal commander. In this attitude Joffre was helped by the fact that the British Government's instructions to Haig differed from those originally given to French. Where French was told to "coincide most sympathetically," but to avoid undue risk, Haig was told that "the closest co-operation between the French and British as a united army must be the governing policy." And in a curiously worded phrase it was added that he would "in no case come under the orders" of Joffre "further than the necessary co-operation with our Allies above referred to."

If this meant anything, it meant that he was under Joffre's orders strategically, although with the power to demur. In practice, his force of character would diminish this subordination; but his trend of military thought would, perhaps, more than make up the difference. The greater nominal subordination of Haig in comparison with his predecessor, and the greater actual subordination of British to French strategy that now developed, make a significant contrast with the greater scale of the British Army in France. At the beginning of 1916, despite the loss of half a million men, its strength had risen to a million and comprised 38 divisions, while the French had 95 divisions. With the addition of the Belgians this provided 139 Allied divisions against 117½ German divisions. And whereas at the end of 1914 the British had only held 21 miles of front out of 466, they now held 67, soon increased to 87 miles. Yet this frontage was still small in proportion to their strength, and mathematically justified French demands that they take over more. While it is to be remembered that the British occupied a strategically vital part of the front, it would seem that Haig required an insurance against risk far in excess of that with which his allies had to be content. But, in resisting French demands, he was primarily inspired by an offensive purpose—that of making his eventual attack as powerful as possible. And to this end Robertson aided him with such single-eyed concentration that by midsummer he was reinforced by a further 19 divisions at the expense of other theatres—and of Britain's traditional strategy. In the narrow coastal tract of Flanders and Northern France were sunk all but a fraction of the British forces. The historic "cockpit of Europe" became the sump-pit of the British Empire.

Foch prepared and Joffre approved a plan whereby the French and British would attack "shoulder to shoulder" on the Somme, the French with 40 divisions on a twenty-five mile front from Lassigny north to the Somme, and the British with 25 divisions if possible from the Somme northward as far as Hébuterne. But Joffre considered that the Allied armies would not be ready for this big effort until summer, and that it should be preceded by strong preliminary attacks to wear down the German forces

and absorb their reserves. For this "preparatory" rôle he cast his allies. Even before the inter-Allied conference in early December, Poincaré was informed that Joffre had "in mind a war of attrition which must be chiefly carried out by our allies, England, Russia, and even Italy. . . ."

In the course of a visit to Haig on January 20th, Joffre suggested that the British should make a large-scale attack, on at least a twelve-mile front, in April. And he followed up the proposal by a letter in which he bluntly said: "I regard it as indispensable that before the general offensive, the British Army should seek to wear down the German forces by wide and powerful offensives, as the French did during the year 1915."

This was hardly an encouraging example to quote, and all the less so because Joffre and Foch gave Haig a clear hint that this time it was for the British to carry out this preparatory task, and that the French would not take the offensive until it was done.

Haig's reaction was equally strong. Even if he had been ready, he had a well-founded disbelief in the value of preparatory attacks made so long ahead. In his reply he recognised that preparatory attacks made only ten days or a fortnight before the main offensive, and at points well distant from its selected site, might draw off the enemy's reserves. Even so, the British Army had not yet sufficient heavy artillery for the double purpose, although it might be possible to transfer batteries in time from one point to the other.

Haig, like Nivelle a year later, advocated one great stroke with all the forces available, with raids meantime to keep the enemy on tenter-hooks, while Joffre continued to press for preparatory attacks. Finally, they settled their differences at a conference on February 14th, whereat Joffre gave up his demand on condition that Haig made a partial attack in the Armentières sector just previous to the main offensive on the Somme, which was now fixed for July 1st. Haig, in return, agreed to take over the Arras sector from the French Tenth Army, which, since the previous August, had been sandwiched between the right and centre British Armies.

This arrangement was not altogether to the taste of Foch,

although in obedience to Joffre's instructions he had prepared the plan of attack. For Foch was convinced that Vimy Ridge offered the key to a decisive avenue of advance, and, contrariwise, thought that the sector south of the Somme as well as that in Champagne were strategic dead-ends. In his view they offered no important objective, and had the disadvantage as lines of advance that the one was bounded by the "ditch" of the Somme and the other by that of the Aisne. It is interesting to note that his view had here an essentially geographical focus.

But one modification which he introduced into the plan of attack, and to which he gained Haig's assent, was that instead of the Somme forming the line of division between the Allied armies, one French corps should be sent north of the river. This change fulfilled the military theory that the forces operating on either side of such a dividing barrier should be under one command, to ensure co-ordination. But it was to prove a case where theory had practical drawbacks, for in the outcome the presence of a French corps north of the river complicated the arrangements for synchronised action, and cramped the free action of the British right wing. Perhaps at the back of Foch's mind there was the idea that this corps might serve as a lever to turn the lateral barrier to his advance south of the Somme that was formed by the L-shaped course of the river (the Somme flows northward to Péronne before it turns westward to the sea). It is noteworthy that the corps chosen to act north of the river was his own former *corps d'élite*, the XX.

Exactly a week after the conference where Joffre and Haig had settled their plan of attack, its base and their calculations were upset by the German attack on Verdun. For on February 21st Falkenhayn fulfilled his long-cherished dream of seeking a decision in France, the dream which had led him to curtail his ever-successful strokes against Russia, and that he now sought to realise by a gradual offensive process which should "bleed France white." At Joffre's conference such a possibility had not been discussed, nor Verdun even mentioned.

The omission was not surprising, because Joffre had failed to foresee or prepare to meet such a menace. Since, in August, 1915,

he had persuaded the Government to place the fortress of Verdun under his control, Joffre had drained it of men and guns, and had taken no care to compensate the drain by adequate trench defences. Back in December, warnings of the weakness had percolated through to Paris, but in response to Galli ni's enquiry Joffre had contemptuously dismissed such "apprehensions," and complained that the spreading of such baseless rumours was "calculated to disturb profoundly the spirit of discipline in the Army." Eventually his Intelligence branch had discerned signs of the German preparations, but his Operations branch had been too full of their own offensive schemes to pay heed. As late as February 18th he implied in a letter to Haig that if the Germans took the offensive at all, it would be once more against the Russians. Next day Castelnau informed Haig that the enemy were about to attack Verdun ! Thus it was only at the last hour that a reinforcement of two army corps was despatched, and arrived in time to stiffen a frail and cracking line. Only the indomitable fortitude of the fighting men, whose warnings had been unheeded, had saved the line from breaking already. And even they could not have saved it if the heavens had not come to their aid. For heavy rain had postponed the launching of an attack that should, according to the German plan, have been launched on February 13th. In that case Verdun would certainly have been mentioned at Joffre's conference !

As it was, the timely arrival of the reinforcements and the gradually swelling process of the enemy's attack obscured the gravity of the danger. Even when the news of the crumbling front came through, Joffre was not moved, much less disturbed. And his staff assured him that the Germans, presumably imitating his own intention, were only attacking Verdun as a blind to cover the real attack, which, they admitted, might now fall on some part of the French front. But on the night of the 24th reports so alarming came in that Castelnau, greatly daring, insisted that one of the aides-de-camp should knock on Joffre's bedroom door, regularly locked at ten o'clock to shut out all disturbers of his sleep. Before Joffre returned to his bed he had given Castelnau authority to travel through the night to Verdun

with "full powers" to deal with the situation. It was also arranged that Pétain should take charge of the defence. Summoned to Chantilly before undertaking the task, he found Joffre still far from realising the full emergency, the interview concluding with the words: "Well, my friend, now you are easy in your mind." On reaching Verdun he found ample reason for uneasiness. The "great brooding mass" of Fort Douaumont, the most commanding point on the semicircle of hills that covered Verdun, had just fallen into the assailants' hands.

Henceforth crisis would follow crisis during four dreadful months, and although each would be survived, the greater part of the French Army would be drawn through the German artillery mincing-machine. Thereby the French were compelled against their will to carry out the wearing-down process—in an indirect form—which Joffre had intended should be the lot of his allies. It was truly a grim jest of fate. And the more grim because the French were worn down faster than their assailants.

Joffre's first reaction was to ask Haig to hasten the relief of the Tenth Army in order to provide himself with reserves for a counter-offensive. He also asked the Russian and Italian Armies to assist him by indirect action.

In response, the Italians launched the fifth of their eleven vain attacks on the Isonzo front, while the Russians hurled their untrained masses into the cauldron of Lake Narocz. Three months later they would again come to the rescue of their allies, this time of Italy, hard-pressed by the Austrian attack in the Trentino, as well as of France. And Brusilov's attack on June 4th, initiated as a mere distraction, would have such amazing initial success that into it, prematurely yet too late, would be diverted the reserves intended for the main Russian offensive. His ultimate loss of a million men sealed the ruin of Russia's military power. Nevertheless, Brusilov's offensive had a Samson-like grandeur, for it not only stopped the Austrian attack on Italy, compelled the withdrawal of troops from France, and led to the accession of Rumania, but buried Falkenhayn himself in the ruins of his 1916 plan.

The second reaction of Verdun on Joffre's 1916 plan was to

make him put forward the provisional date of the main Franco-British offensive and abandon the idea of preparatory attacks. And with every fresh blow suffered and parried at Verdun the framework of his offensive design was shaken.

Foch was hit on the rebound. As more divisions were drawn to and worn down at Verdun, so did his prospective forces shrink. On April 15th he was warned that he would only have 30 instead of 40 divisions. A month later they were reduced to 26. Eventually they would shrink to 16, and the frontage of attack from twenty-five miles to eight. The main burden of the offensive was thus transferred to British shoulders, and Foch himself had perforce to play second fiddle to Haig in the Somme orchestra.

In the sphere of action, if not of advice, Foch reconciled himself to such a part. For this year his outlook was adjusted to the limitation of his means, and his method of attack based on limitation of objectives. In a "Note on the Offensive Battle," drawn up in March, he gave the ruling that "the depth of ground that can be swept by artillery determines the space which can be assigned for the infantry to conquer." Hence, the offensive would consist of a methodical series of bites which would both eat away and eat a way through the successive layers of the enemy's defensive system. "When the enemy, his reserves exhausted, can no longer oppose us with organised and continuous defences, then only can we abandon the methodical mode of action."

His conversion to the belief that only the "limited" method was practicable was shared by Rawlinson, the commander of the adjoining British Fourth Army, who would be in executive charge of the British wing of the attack. But their respective superiors had different and more ambitious views.

Joffre certainly spoke of a "series of efforts" and of "a long and hard battle," but a "break-through" was also his constant refrain. The explanation would seem to be that, while he unwillingly accepted the limited method as an initial necessity, he still hoped, as fervently as in 1915, that it would miraculously change into an unlimited collapse of the enemy's front.

Haig, as an ardent cavalryman, naturally found slow siege warfare methods even more disagreeable. And he went further than Joffre in bidding for a break-through. On April 3rd Rawlinson submitted to him a plan for a methodical attack which should be preceded by the several days' bombardment that Foch favoured, and should aim to conquer merely the enemy's front position in the first phase. Haig criticised this plan, with justice, as being too straightforward and devoid of surprise. Instead of trying to satisfy its psychological wants, however, he merely gave rein to his appetite for larger results. Rawlinson's diary for April 30th records : "The attack is to go for the big thing. I still think we would do better to proceed by shorter steps ; but I have told D. H. [Douglas Haig] I will carry out his plan with as much enthusiasm as if it were my own."

While Haig somewhat reduced his desires to meet Rawlinson's objections, and gave way to Rawlinson's desire for a long bombardment, his final instructions were that, on the left, part of the German second position should be captured on the first day. The rolling uplands of Picardy rise to a high ridge which forms the watershed between the Somme and Ancre. This ran obliquely across the front. As usual, the Germans were ensconced on top ; their second position ran along the ridge between Guillemont and Pozières. Thus the sector where the British attack would fall formed a rough **N**—the left-hand stroke being the original front, the oblique stroke being the watershed with the enemy's second position along it, and the right-hand stroke being the Péronne-Bapaume road, whither Joffre and Haig sought to break through as a prelude to an advance into open country. Haig's aim for the first day was to reach a line that would place him across the oblique stroke, thus : **N**. He held out no prospect of providing increased strength for the increased task, although his artillery adviser, endorsing Rawlinson's view, warned him that he was stretching his artillery too far. He even asked Rawlinson to extend his front of attack to Gommecourt ; but in face of Rawlinson's protest he handed over this extra task to Allenby's Third Army.

On reaching Bapaume, Haig's intention was to widen the

breach by swinging left and rolling up the German front northward as far as Arras. His cavalry were given, optimistically, the rôle of pushing on to Bapaume ahead of the infantry and then making a scythe-like sweep on the outer flank of the northward swing. Haig, in fact, was dreaming of a break-through such as the enemy had achieved a year before on the Dunajec against the Russians. But the 1915 defences on the Russian front could not be compared with the network of wire and trenches on the Somme. And on the Somme the vast preparations for the attack were as carelessly displayed as on the Dunajec they had been skilfully cloaked. Moreover, as we now know, the German tactics on the Dunajec in 1915 foreshadowed their flexible infiltration method of 1918. In contrast, the Fourth Army tactics went, not a year forward, but half a century backward. They reverted almost to the Crimean method, the infantry being taught to advance in symmetrical well-dressed lines at a slow walk, preserving an even advance instead of probing the weak points of the defence. If it is fair to remark that these rigid infantry tactics were inspired by the idea of conforming to the artillery programme, the fact remains that by no reasonable calculation was the artillery powerful enough to be decisive. While Foch had 900 heavy guns, Haig had less than half this number for a much wider frontage. Yet, as the day approached, he seems to have grown more rather than less optimistic, despite the fact that the French had now resigned to him the major task. Whereas, during the early discussions, he had said that the corps were not to attack until their commanders were satisfied that the enemy defences had been adequately crushed, he no longer mentioned this essential condition.

In contrast, Foch's doubts had certainly grown. On April 13th he had warned Joffre that there must be an abundant supply of ammunition. "If this cannot be furnished, no military result can be attained on the Western front." A fortnight later Joffre intimated that the needs of Verdun would curtail Foch's supply, and that he must curtail his frontage. Thereupon Foch wrote: "We are a long way from that wide, powerful offensive which has in view an attainable objective and which can be kept up ;

and yet these are the sole conditions which permit an attack to reach a strategic result and not fade away into helplessness. After a few tactical successes at the start, we are likely to see our action halted—in other words, losses and sacrifices to no profitable end.”

In the middle of May he paid a visit to Henry Wilson, whose corps was now holding the Vimy Ridge sector that had been taken over from the French. It was a strange coincidence that friend should take the place of friend on this luckless ground; the ill-omen was fulfilled barely a week later when Wilson lost ground to a German surprise attack, and thereby blotted the otherwise blank record of his short career as a commander. During the visit Foch “expressed the view that the Allies must mobilise and organise their resources more fully, that infinitely more guns and ammunition must be turned out by France and Great Britain . . . and that then, perhaps a year hence, it might be possible to secure victory.” A more personal sidelight on the visit comes from Wilson’s Chief of Staff, De Pree: “On occasions like this, General Foch and Sir Henry used to be closeted together for hours, discussing, gossiping and chatting. They used to exchange caps, and in this get-up they would stride up and down the drawing-room, laughing heartily and exchanging experiences.”

This clowning was a relief from foreboding. Another light on Foch’s prevailing outlook was thrown by a conference near Amiens on May 29th, presided over by Poincaré and attended by the chief members of the French Government as well as by Joffre, Castelnau, Foch and Haig. The President remarked that “it was important to make sure that the generals were united in their views, as it appeared that General Foch had stated to several politicians that he was against any offensive that year.” He added that Pétain and Nivelle, whom he had just seen at Verdun, had gravely warned him “Verdun will be taken,” and showed an urgent desire that the Somme attack should be accelerated to relieve the pressure on Verdun.

Joffre set his face against a premature delivery of the offensive, but he gave Haig a clear hint that the French might not be able

to take any part, except by reinforcing the British artillery. A few days later he informed Haig that only one French army instead of three, as originally, would take part in the attack, and that there was no question of Foch reaching the objective previously intended. This army, Fayolle's, would attack astride the Somme on a front of less than nine miles. Whereas in April Joffre had spoken of the British mission being "to co-operate in the action of the French forces," he now said that the task of the French would be "to support the British."

But while curtailing his own he did nothing to discourage Haig's ambitious aims. His attitude, if not his speech, was that, "If Haig likes to gamble, let him! He'll have to pay the piper." Joffre even urged Haig to push straight on eastwards from Bapaume, without waiting to widen the gap, and G.Q.G. sent Haig an "instruction" that the object of the operations was "to place a mass of manœuvre on the junctions of the enemy's lines of communication marked by Cambrai-Le Cateau-Maubeuge, etc." That the road from Bapaume to Cambrai was given as "the axis of our initial progress" showed clearly that the break-through was left to the British.

Foch shared Joffre's feeling. He was anxious to profit by anything that Haig liked to attempt, and several times sought to persuade Haig to help him more directly. At first he had suggested that the British should launch their attack several days before his own—a proposal that Haig emphatically rejected—and now he sent to G.H.Q. a criticism of Haig's plan for enlarging the gap. Instead of the British swinging north on reaching Bapaume, Foch wished them first to help him by stretching their right arm south as far as Sailly Saillisel. Haig did not even send a reply to this suggestion, although, when Joffre echoed it, he argued that the Germans might strike his own left flank meanwhile.

Haig's readiness to resent any advice or cajolery on Foch's part became increasingly obvious. When agreeing to Joffre's suggestion that the offensive should be launched "about July 1st," he had pointedly asked that no postponement should be made at the last moment "as General Foch had requested three times in

1915." His uneasiness on this score was to be justified. For, after he had put forward the date to June 25th because of a new crisis at Verdun and in the French Parliament, he was asked to postpone it until June 29th or July 1st because the French preparations were not complete. He agreed to the 29th, but no later, telling Joffre bluntly that he had hurried on his own preparations to suit the French. Five days before the attack was due he was told that Balfourier's XX Corps on his immediate right would not be ready on the 29th. Haig's anger was unconcealed, and in face of his objection to any postponement Foch did not argue the point. Then, on the 28th, when part of Haig's assaulting troops had already moved up to the trenches, the rain came down and flooded the trenches, and Haig was forced to concede to General Rain the postponement that he was inclined to withhold from General Foch.

In discussion, as on the battlefield, Foch had increasingly learnt that there were limits to the practicability of will-pressure. Perhaps the analogy from a physical experience helped to show him its drawbacks. For in May he had a narrow escape in a motor accident on the road from Amiens to Châlons. "I was with Fournier, my son-in-law. The road was good, we were not going too fast, but a country cart in front of us suddenly stopped. The horse took fright and swerved across the road. Our driver put on the brakes, and we were flung against a tree. I went through the glass. Fournier collided with the door-frame and broke the bone in his nose. I had gashes all over my face, eyes, mouth and head. It was near a place called Plessis-something-or-other. We were taken to Meaux. My medical officer André rushed over from Amiens and sewed me up. I still bear the scars. It was on a Thursday. By Sunday I was off again, my head all bandaged up. What caused me most inconvenience was my mouth. I could no longer eat. . . ." Foch's disclaimer that he was going too fast may have been true—for once. But his general reputation was shown in the comment that Poincaré made when next they met : "I hope you will not drive so quickly after this accident."

In the opening stages of the Somme offensive he certainly did not drive his infantry forward. Wiser than their allies, they

adopted the Germans' Verdun method of sending forward strong patrols to test the effect of the bombardment before the mass of the infantry were launched. The French not merely saved but profited by it.

After a week's bombardment the great assault was delivered at 7.30 a.m. on July 1st—a day of fiery heat. Thirteen British divisions, with six more close up, began to advance at a stately pace which gave the enemy time, wherever No Man's Land was wide, to bring out their machine-guns from shelter after the barrage lifted. In the furnace of their fire the dense British lines melted with tragic swiftness. Sixty thousand men fell on that one day, the heaviest day's loss in the history of the British Army. And for little result.

The attack of the four army corps on the left ended in utter failure. The two on the right captured most of the German first position, so that a fairly deep if narrow incision was made in the enemy's front.

On their right the French XX Corps gained its objective at comparatively small loss. South of the Somme, where the attack began two hours later, it went forward with even more ease, and by evening the enemy's second position was reached. The proportion of prisoners on this day was a good index to the proportionate success. Although Foch used only five divisions in all, these took 6,000 prisoners, whereas the British, with nearly three times the strength, captured less than a third of this number. The difference was due to a heavier artillery concentration and better adjusted infantry methods. It is true that the difference was long ascribed by British apologists to the suggested fact that the enemy were only expecting an attack on the British front. But we now know that the local German Army Command anticipated the French attack also, although their troops south of the Somme may have been less alert when it came.

Falkenhayn himself did not believe that the attack would come, even on the British Fourth Army front—perhaps because the preparations for it were so blatant. Even when it was launched he was still convinced, until July 5th, that it was only a feint to cover the real attack further north, and so he withheld reinforce-

ments. The consequence was to give the assailants a real chance of developing their partial penetration into a break-through.

They did not take the chance. Here was the irony of events. If fresh divisions had been pushed through where the front had been cracked they would have found little to stop them—for several days. But although Haig had provided an alternative plan in case of complete failure—to switch his reserves north for an attack at Messines—he did not foresee the case of partial success, always the greater probability in war. This omission made adaptation slow. It was the slower, and forfeit of the opportunity surer, because of the rigid adherence of Rawlinson and Foch to the “limited” method.

Having done nothing all day to push reserves through in the sectors of least resistance, on the evening of July 1st Rawlinson merely ordered his corps “to continue the attack,” evenly along the whole front. For this purpose he placed his two left-wing corps under Gough, but the latter, for all his thrustfulness, realised the folly of throwing these two shattered corps anew against unbroken defences.

Rather belatedly, Haig decided on the 2nd to press the attack with his more successful right wing. But Rawlinson’s “limited” ideas still proved an obstacle. The Fourth Army commander once more ordered an attempt to storm the upper angle of the N at Thiepval, and although this forlorn hope was modified by Haig, the right wing was restrained from pressing on. Its inactivity in turn restrained the French corps in the narrow corridor between it and the Somme.

South of the Somme the Germans evacuated their second position, and the French gained the high ground overlooking Péronne. They might have pushed on more easily than any, but an ill-conceived order kept them marking time until there was a general advance north of the Somme. Through too pedantic fidelity to linear theory the whole Allied line of attack was, in fact, held back by its own left, embedded on the slopes of Thiepval.

When Haig overcame Rawlinson’s passive resistance to the idea of uneven pressure, he met a fresh and French stumbling-

block. Both Joffre and Foch were agreed in advocating the line that was strategically desirable in preference to the line that was practically possible. On the 3rd Foch went with Weygand to Beauquesne, where Joffre and Haig met for a heated discussion. Joffre insisted that Haig should capture the left end of the ridge as a preliminary to any attack on the right at Longueval. Haig's practical contention that he had not enough ammunition to cover effectively an attack on the whole front, and that the defences at Longueval were weaker than at Thiepval, made no impression on Joffre, who declared that if Haig attacked Longueval he would be beaten. Indeed, he went so far as to give Haig a direct order to follow his plan, whereupon Haig retorted that he was responsible to the British Government, and would follow his own line in questions of tactics. This settled the question.

When Wilson visited Foch two days later he heard Foch's story of this interview. "Haig showed that he was much upset by his losses . . . and that therefore he was not much inclined to attack again at Thiepval-Serre, but proposed to exploit the success further south. This infuriated Joffre, who simply went for Haig and, as Foch said, was quite *brutal*. Haig said he was not speaking as one gentleman to another, and old Joffre said he would have no further dealings with Haig over this matter, and that Haig must work it out with Foch." According to others present, however, the ferocity of the debate was somewhat exaggerated in this recital.

Wilson added: "On the whole, then, Foch is very pleased with his own advance and displeased with ours, but does not think that Haig yet understands in what ours failed—viz., not nearly sufficient concentration of fire before infantry attack." While there was some justice in the criticism, Foch seems to have overlooked the fact that he had twice as many heavy guns for only half the British frontage.

Despite Haig's determination, there was a long interval before the right wing of the Fourth Army was ready for the attack on the German second position. And the interval was the longer because Haig deemed it necessary to nibble away all the enemy's outlying foothills before attempting his main bite.

By a curious reversal of attitude, Rawlinson now became the advocate of bolder measures. He obtained Haig's dubious sanction to try a night-advance up to the enemy's second position, followed after a mere five minutes' intense bombardment by an assault in the half-light. Originality was repaid by surprise. The attack crashed through the German second position, except on the right. But its effect was limited both by slenderness of force and by narrowness of front—a mere four divisions on a four-mile sector. The handicap was the greater because the French on the right did not take part—from lack of faith in the attempt.

After the failure to exploit this opening Haig reverted to the nibbling method, now to be exalted as a definite and masterly strategy of attrition, and to be defended by optimistic miscalculations of the German losses. Nearly two months of bitter fighting followed, during which little progress was made at much cost. The cost was, however, more evenly balanced than hitherto, through the stupidity of the German army commander, who issued an order that any officer who dared to evacuate a pulverised yard of trench would be court-martialled. Thus the infantry of both sides served as compressed cannon-fodder for artillery consumption, and as driven game for the machine "guns." At Pozières, for example, successive Australian brigades were thrown twenty times in succession against this one small point for the ultimate gain, after six weeks, of a narrow tongue of ground barely a mile deep. And with almost equal persistency the German infantry were driven to the counter-attack. Unimaginative obstinacy could be carried no further. Even the stoutest hearts among the survivors shrivelled in the furnace. Their feeling was epitomised in one of the letters that are quoted in the Australian official history: "For Christ's sake, write a book on the life of an infantryman, and by doing so you will prevent these shocking tragedies."

While the British had forfeited opportunities, the French, on the other hand, had abstained from taking them. Foch's course of waiting upon the British left cost more in the outcome. For when increased resources allowed him to extend his offensive, the Germans had not only brought increased forces to resist him

but had developed new lines of defence to replace those he had broken. Thus the belated entry into the battle of part of Micheler's Tenth Army, on the right of Fayolle's Sixth Army, did not fulfil anticipations. Micheler's left wing succeeded in biting off another slice of the enemy's first position, but Fayolle's men failed to deepen the bulge they had already made. Foch sought to loosen this hardening resistance by instructing Fayolle to make large and repeated attacks with the least possible interval, but the effect of his prescription is not historically or geographically perceptible. If the British progress between the middle of July and the end of August was slight, that of the French was scarcely measurable.

But the failure of Foch's subordinates to fulfil the orders he issued seems to have worried him less than his inability to give Haig similar instructions. On August 12th Wilson paid Foch a visit at Villers-Bretonneux: "Foch told me all his secrets. In the first place he is dissatisfied with his relations with Haig. Haig is always civil and nice, but tells him nothing, and the relationship between them is not such that Foch can converse freely with Haig and tell him all his plans and hopes and experiences. . . . Foch wanted to know how we could get back to the old happy relations, and wanted me back, but realised this was impossible. Then Foch told me of his long interview with Lloyd George, who came to see him yesterday. Lloyd George asked innumerable questions about why we took so few prisoners, why we took so little ground, why we had such heavy losses, all these in comparison with the French. Foch played up well as regards Haig and would not give him away. . . . Foch said that Lloyd George was *très monté* against Haig, and he did not think Haig's seat was very secure."

Wilson was not the only one to be told of this conversation with Lloyd George. Foch lost no time in telling Haig, also, that Lloyd George had invited him to criticise Haig's methods, which he had loyally refused to do. There is so curious a coincidence between this well-meaning breach of confidence and that of November, 1914, as to suggest that Foch hoped by it to woo Haig's confidence as he had won French's. If so, the effort was

not altogether successful, though relations between the two leaders certainly became closer in September than they had been earlier.

Foch's material resources, also, became ampler, as the demands of Verdun lessened. For after the opening of the Somme offensive Falkenhayn sent no fresh divisions to Verdun, and the German offensive there died away from lack of nourishment.

Despite Haig's professed adherence to the attrition doctrine preached by Joffre, his faith seems to have been shaken after two months' trial. For on August 30th Rawlinson's diary records: "The Chief is anxious to have a gamble with all the available troops about September 15th, with the object of breaking down the German resistance and getting through to Bapaume." And it adds, illogically: "We shall have no reserves in hand, save tired troops, but success at this time . . . might bring the Boches to terms."

The attack was to pivot on the left wing, which had been formed into a separate Fifth Army under Gough. The general direction of the attack north of the Somme was now swung towards the north-east, Rawlinson's army forming the centre and Fayolle's the right wing. To give Fayolle's attack fresh weight, Foch had put in two new corps north of the Somme, and during September he added a further two. But the crowding of five army corps into so narrow a space caused a congestion that hampered movement and gave the German guns a massed target.

While Foch threw the main weight of his resources north of the Somme, he also arranged to extend his front of attack south of the Somme. And he no longer waited for Haig. In the first week of September, while Rawlinson was still battering his way forward to secure a straight starting-line for the "big push," Micheler's army broke into a further three miles of the original German front line near Chaulnes, and took 7,000 prisoners. On the 12th Fayolle launched his general attack north of the river, and for a few hours a break-through seemed possible. But reserves were not pushed through to exploit the opportunity, perhaps because the French command was surprised by its own

success. And when Fayolle's attack was renewed on the 15th, in conjunction with the British, its sting was drawn and its failure reacted adversely on the British effort. For this, Haig pledged the great asset latent in a new weapon—the tank. Its creators had repeatedly insisted that it should not be used until, with machines tested and crews trained, it could be launched in mass for a great surprise stroke. In the spring Haig had agreed with this argument. In August he suddenly changed his mind and decided to use the mere sixty then ready—to redeem the fading prospects of the Somme offensive. The protests of its creators and of the Prime Minister proved vain. Haig was immovable.

The sacrifice brought mediocre results. On the 15th the British made promising if uneven progress, and a fresh attack ten days later established them along the long-sought crest of the ridge, while Fayolle's fresh advance on Rawlinson's right combined with it to pinch out Combles. But the real result was shown in Joffre's decision, at the end of the month, not to continue the offensive on any large scale.

Both Foch and Haig, however, were unwilling to relax their efforts. Rawlinson in vain pointed out the folly, now that the crest was gained, of fighting a way down into the valley beyond. The early onset of the autumn rains reinforced his opinion. And they also reinforced the bombardment in making the ground a morass in which guns and transport were bogged, while even lightly equipped infantry could barely struggle forward. That attacks thus handicapped should fail was inevitable, and by October 12th Haig seems to have realised at last the impossibility of piercing the German defences that year.

But Foch's ardour was undamped by the rain, and Joffre intervened to reinforce it anew just as Haig was tending to relax. On October 16th Joffre wrote to say that as local attacks were having such slight effect, it was "necessary to revert to the methods used at the start of the battle." He pressed Haig to make "large and deep attacks."

One impulse to this astonishingly irrational conclusion—that as the troops had failed to advance a short way they ought to advance a long way—came from the disasters which were be-

falling Rumania, whose intervention in the war had given the German command a fresh and easy target. How far Joffre was also influenced by Foch's belief that the German resistance on the Somme was breaking down is uncertain. What actually broke down, under the weight of the weather, was Joffre's purpose.

Under pressure from Joffre and Foch, Haig continued to call for fresh attacks until Lord Cavan, a corps commander, asked whether it was deliberately intended to sacrifice the British right to help the French left, and pointedly added: "No one who has not visited the front can really know the state of exhaustion to which the men are reduced." As other corps commanders had less moral courage, petty and useless attacks continued until mid-November. And on the extreme left wing the falling curtain was momentarily rolled back to show a bright lining—when Gough's coup at Beaumont-Hamel cut off the corner of the original German front.

The French part of the offensive lacked any such final contrast to relieve the gloom. Its finish was as disappointing as the British beginning. And public opinion in France, exhausted by the long strain at Verdun, was as depressed at the losses as it was critical of the achievement. Despite this secondary rôle, the French losses on the Somme were almost half (actually 195,000) the British total of 412,000, a figure which in turn was not far below the total German losses against both British and French. "No more Sommes" became the nation-wide cry.

It was the more resounding because there was now a comparison that could throw back the echo. The French had taken the chance to profit by the enemy's relaxed pressure on Verdun, and, under Pétain's direction, Nivelle had prepared a local offensive which Mangin's corps would execute. On October 24th the stroke had been delivered in a thick fog, and had regained Fort Douaumont—exactly eight months after its loss—besides taking 6,000 prisoners. Naturally the dramatic nature of the coup and the sentimental nature of the site enhanced the impression on the French public.

On November 15th Joffre held a fresh inter-Allied military conference at Chantilly, and the decision was made to renew the

general offensive early in February. Joffre proposed that the French should strike on a wide front between the Somme and the Oise, while the British attacked between Bapaume and Vimy. The French Fifth Army, just west of Reims, would chime in subsequently.

Foch, with characteristic disdain for mud and human exhaustion, was eager to renew the offensive at the earliest moment. But his opinion was now increasingly discounted at G.Q.G., not merely by genuine critics, but by the ingenuously ambitious. He was spoken of "as a once great soldier who was but a shadow of his old self." Actually, it was the rising sun of Nivelle which had thrown Foch into the shadow. The ambitious hastened to bow down before it. Self-deception came easy to them, as always. They sympathetically discussed Foch's health and lamented that he had never been the same man since his motor accident—they would have heard a different opinion if they had asked his doctor. The oddities of manner which had formerly been hailed as the mark of genius were now regarded as the symptoms of dotage.

These ripples of rumour spread to political Paris, where criticism had more genuine motives. Recouly has related a conversation that he had with Viviani, then Prime Minister. When he mentioned the growing opposition to Joffre and Foch, Viviani replied: "You don't know the whole truth. Foch is much more tired and ill than people imagine; besides, what can you make of such a man. He's a mystic!"

That Foch had lost the confidence of the Government was bad, but not fatal. The *coup de grâce* came from Joffre, who was himself the chief target of political and public opinion. His star had deserted him; his neglect to safeguard Verdun in the previous winter was now generally known, and this time, in contrast to 1914, he did not acquire borrowed laurels from the counter-stroke made by a subordinate. The Government had retained him in power throughout the summer mainly as a symbol to sustain public confidence. But only in the autumn did a louder volume of criticism awaken him to the full insecurity of his position.

On November 29th there was an ominous debate in Parlia-

ment. One prominent member declared amid applause: "The name of Joffre is no longer a synonym for confidence. Prime Minister, do not link your fate with that of Chantilly!"

Quick as ever to cope with a personal emergency, Joffre sought to propitiate the angry gods by sacrificing Foch as his scapegoat. A day or two later one of his intimate staff was walking with him in the forest of Chantilly. Suddenly Joffre said: "It seems that Foch is really ill?" The officer, who had a privileged license for candour, began to laugh and replied: "What, you too, General? I thought it was only the staff of General de Castelnau who believed in Foch's illness." Joffre smiled a little, but said nothing.

According to Painlevé, the Government had nothing to do with Foch's removal, which was made on the definite and reiterated demand of Joffre. We know also that early in December Joffre informed Nivelle that he would be appointed to command the Northern Group of Armies and conduct the next offensive. This obviously meant that Foch would have to vacate the post. A few days later the fateful stroke was delivered by telegram.

In later years Foch's laughing comment on the excuse was: "When you want to kill your dog, you begin by saying it is mad. That's a very old rule to which there are few exceptions." But there are conflicting accounts as to how he took his dismissal at the time. While some of his intimates have acclaimed his calm, uncomplaining dignity in adversity, there is a strong body of witnesses who have given different evidence. Perhaps the explanation is that the former refer to his attitude after the first shock, while the latter deal with his first reaction. It is said that he hurried to Chantilly and there made such violent protest to Joffre that his voice could be heard in the neighbouring rooms. And that in deprecatory reply, Joffre stammered: "You are *limogé*, I shall be *limogé*, we shall all be *limogé*." Like Stellenbosch in the South African War, Limoges was the centre to which had been consigned the many French generals dismissed by Joffre himself since the war began.

Clemenceau, again, has recounted how one morning he was surprised to see Foch arrive at his house in Paris, showing strong

emotion. Foch told Clemenceau that Joffre had said to him : " I'm an unhappy man. I want to excuse myself for an ill-turn that I've done you. Monsieur Poincaré has sent for me and given me the order to sack you. I ought never to have agreed. I gave way. I come to ask your pardon." After reciting this news Foch asked Clemenceau what he should do. Clemenceau advised him to obey without recrimination and to wait a turn of events.

The first hint of his removal seems to have come to Foch from his old friend Admiral Lacaze, who was acting Minister of War. After the war Foch admitted that he made a heated protest and confirmed that he had said : " I want to kill Boches. I want to kill Boches. If the Government wants to recall me from my command, let it do so ; but it shall not say that I'm ill, for that's a lie !"

He was then asked if he would take a post out of the fighting zone, to avoid putting him under the orders of a junior. He replied : " That's immaterial to me. Leave me with the fighting troops." In post-war reminiscence he said, perhaps with some hyperbole : " To remain at the front, to avoid being sent to the rear, I would have consented to command a division, even a brigade. There can be no degradation in leading French soldiers. In my opinion, whenever a general was offered an inferior command and refused it, he did very wrong."

Foch, however, was not called upon to make such a sacrifice of dignity. Nor was he given the chance of preserving an executive rôle. Instead, a theoretical post was created in which he could exercise his talent for advice. Its creation, and Foch's nomination, was the work of Joffre, who thus eased the fall of his old assistant.

But Joffre failed to avert his own fall, although that fall was of the kind, a well-known military phenomenon, which defies the law of gravity. On December 12th he was appointed technical adviser to the Government on the general conduct of the war. While he was to keep the title of Commander-in-Chief for all fronts, Nivelle was to become " Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East"—*i.e.*, of the field armies

in France. Events now, however, moved fast. On December 15th, the very day that this new arrangement came into operation, a new offensive operation at Verdun regained another large slice of long-lost ground and captured 9,000 prisoners. The stroke released a gush of popular enthusiasm which submerged all chance of protest on Joffre's behalf. A few days later General Lyautey arrived from Morocco to become—for a brief time—Minister of War in the new Government. This beneficent colonial autocrat had no intention of taking up a post where his power for good was curtailed. The new arrangement made Joffre an intermediary, even if only as a post office, between the Minister of War and the executive commander. Lyautey would have none of it. The obstacle was overcome by raising Joffre a further step in honorific ineffectiveness. He was de-moted by promotion. While stripping him of all power the grade of Marshal was revived for his consolation, and on December 27th he became the first Marshal of the Third Republic.

The rarefied atmosphere of this altitude was at once felt. When he summoned his staff to say farewell and asked who would accompany him as his orderly officers, only one volunteered, the much-abused but ever-faithful Commandant Thouzelier. Waiting without comment 'until the others had gone, Joffre turned to the loyal one and, with a friendly pat, exclaimed: "Poor old Joffre! Damned old Thouzelier!"

Nivelle's appointment to the Commander-in-Chief left vacant the command of the Northern Army Group. Even this new turn of the wheel of fate could not restore Foch to command. Instead it was given to Franchet d'Esperey.

But in the brief interval while Joffre had been "technical adviser" he had created a new advisory branch—to study problems of potential strategy. Nivelle was willing that Foch should preside over it, while preserving the empty title of Army Group Commander, and to this "chair" Foch was appointed on Christmas Eve.

Chapter XV

1917—IN THE SHADOW

ALLOWED to remain in the zone of the armies, Foch chose to settle at a place of reposeful memories. During the summers of 1915 and 1916 he had installed his family in a furnished house on the outskirts of Senlis, itself on the outskirts of Paris. Thither he had gone whenever he could snatch an interval of leisure, or there had stopped on his journeys to and from Chantilly. A man of habit, it was natural that he should now make his habitation at Senlis.

As the house was not free in this winter of his discontent, so unforeseen, he lived in the Hôtel Fautrat and used the Hôtel Bellegarde for his office. They stood in streets that bore visible witness to the enemy's aggressive manner in his first thwarted approach to Paris in 1914. Foch worked off his own exasperated feelings in a more harmless form of physical exertion—hard walking. The energy he therein revealed amply contradicted the stories of his physical decline. He had no intention of lying quietly wrapped "in the winding-sheet of purple wherein the dead gods sleep."

Senlis itself was a site of symbolism. Had not his fellow-countryman, Henry of Navarre, declared: "My hour has begun in the good town of Senlis, and since then it has extended to the whole Kingdom." At Senlis, Foch also would soon emerge from the shadow, helped by his unfailing fortune and others' misfortune, and begin a time of recovery that would only end when the enemy was driven over the frontier of France.

While Senlis was to be the geographical spring of that recovery, Foch's first stay there was short. For a fortnight he worked at "Plan H," a plan to counter a possible German outflanking

movement through Switzerland. On January 12th the plan was forwarded to G.Q.G., and approved by Nivelle. A few days later Castelnau, who was now Commander of the Eastern Group of Armies, left France to take part in an Allied mission to Russia. Foch was therefore sent to the Vosges to take temporary charge of Castelnau's Army Group, an interim appointment that had special justification in the fact that "Plan H" was bound up with this sector. And while Foch was there, Weygand went to Berne to discuss with the Swiss General Staff the steps to be taken if a German invasion were attempted.

But the Germans had a subtler move in contemplation, the most bloodless and yet most effective move of the war. At no cost to themselves it upset the whole Allied plan of campaign for 1917, brought France to the verge of collapse, and caused Britain to strain herself in a way that exposed her to disaster in 1918. On the Allied side the loss was general; the only compensation personal. Without this chain of ill-fortune it is unlikely that the personal fortune of Foch would have recovered.

The move itself, if in part the outcome of the Allies' Somme offensive, was the offspring of the mated minds which now ruled the German strategy. When Hindenburg and Ludendorff had succeeded to Falkenhayn's throne they had set on foot a great reorganisation of Germany's resources. Meantime they proposed to stand militarily on the defensive, although agreeing to the submarine offensive which, intended but narrowly failing to bring England to her knees, brought America into the war. And in the clear light of history we can see that only the political consequence of this naval offensive marred the effect of the military defensive. Thereby alone were the Allied armies rescued from the pit into which they had been lured—by the Germans' well-calculated withdrawal of early 1917.

How did this come about? As a "coefficient of safety" in face of the Somme offensive, Ludendorff had built a new line of defence across the chord of the great salient that bulged south-westward between Lens and Reims. At the end of January, to frustrate the expected renewal of the Allies' offensive, Ludendorff arranged a general and skilfully graduated withdrawal to

this new line, christening the movement with the apt name of "Alberich"—the malicious dwarf in the Nibelung Saga. The whole of the evacuated area was utterly devastated and littered with explosive booby-traps. Although the initial stages of the retirement were begun in February at certain points, the general movement was delayed until the night of March 12th, when signs of the coming Allied offensive were unmistakable.

Confronted with a desert, the Allied pursuit was sluggish, and all the more so because the Allied commanders were slow to believe that their opponents would willingly surrender any ground. For this act of moral courage, of a type so contrary to Foch's, the German command deserves full credit. They would deserve still more if the calculation underlying it was not uncertain. Did Ludendorff at the time conceive it, not merely as a self-protective act, but as a paralysing stroke? For its effect, if not its design, was masterly. It threw out of gear the Allies' prepared offensive, depriving them of power to attack along three-quarters of their intended frontage. Only on the extreme flanks, near Arras and Reims, could and would their offensive now be delivered. They supplied the crowning touch of comedy by claiming the German withdrawal not merely as proof of their success on the Somme, but as a fresh success!

Ludendorff's withdrawal would have limited Joffre's intended offensive even more severely than it limited Nivelle's actual plan. For while Joffre had pointedly left the main share to the British, Nivelle sought to conserve the anticipated glory for the French by extending the scale and width of the convergent attack in Champagne. Thus, whereas Joffre had intended to attack only between Reims and Craonne, Nivelle had extended the frontage of attack as far as Soissons. From a practical point of view it was an unwise change, for it involved a direct assault on the forbidding Chemin-des-Dames ridge, the now historic "hog's back" just north of the Aisne.

It is possible that if Joffre had remained in command the offensive would have cost less than did Nivelle's wild-boar rush. But there is no practical ground for supposing that it would have achieved more than merely to antedate the German withdrawal—

even if the attack had been launched during February. Any incompleteness in the Germans' preparation would have been offset not only by the incompleteness of the Allies' resources, but by the state of the ground and the oft-proved power of machine-gun rearguards to delay any pursuit. Foch's post-war assertion that the war could have been won in 1917 if Joffre and he had not been removed from command was a natural self-deception. Looking back, he once again overlooked the ground beneath his feet. The more probable deduction is that, if he had not been removed from command in 1917, he would have disappeared beyond redemption below the surface of history. Instead, the links of misfortune that made up the chain of events served as a life-line for him, by which his reputation was hauled out of the slough in which it was immersed.

In a paper written on January 14th Nivelle declared: "We shall break the German front when we wish, on condition that we do not attack the strongest point and that we execute the operation by surprise and abrupt attack in twenty-four or forty-eight hours." The aim was attainable, as the Germans would show a year later. But Nivelle's plan violated all the conditions which he himself declared were necessary for its attainment. His paper was so stuffed with bombast and class-room pedantry that it should not have deluded anyone save believers in miracles.

Pétain was not deluded, so, at a very early stage, his objections were met by removing him from any responsibility and handing over the attack in Champagne to a new reserve army group, under Micheler, composed of the three close-packed corps of Mazel, Duchesne (Foch's first Chief of Staff), and Mangin. When the German withdrawal became apparent, doubts spread. Nivelle answered them by a bland assurance that his main and narrow stroke on the Aisne did not "appear to be influenced by the German retirement." Lyautey became so uneasy that he thought of removing Nivelle, but was persuaded that such a change would be too severe a moral shock to the country. Hence he tried to reconcile Nivelle with his subordinates, Nivelle's views with their doubts—especially those of Haig, who had been placed under Nivelle's command for the forthcoming offensive.

Lyautey apparently hoped that he himself would then be able to control Nivelle. But when an adverse reception in the Chamber threatened to weaken his own influence, he seized the chance to resign, bringing down the Government with him.

In the new Government, Painlevé became Minister of War. A man of acute intellect, he distrusted Nivelle's plan as much as he admired Pétain's judgment, yet felt himself caught in the web of events. To remove Nivelle on the eve of the offensive was almost impossible ; it would have seemed to the world a dastardly trick against a commander who had shown his powers so signally at Verdun and had as yet done nothing to disprove his capacity for greater achievements. To retain Nivelle while countermanding his cherished offensive would have been equally difficult and utterly unwise. Hence Painlevé fell back on an attempt to induce Nivelle to modify his plan and pay heed to the objections of the executive commanders. For Painlevé had found that Franchet d'Esperey, Micheler and Pétain, the three main army group commanders, were of opinion that the German withdrawal had disrupted the plan and that a break-through was now impossible.

But Painlevé's well-meant efforts broke down before the invincible optimism of Nivelle. In him the earlier delusions of Joffre and Foch were reborn. He was certain of success, declaring that the enemy's new line was a mere bluff, that he would break their first two positions "with insignificant loss," that in three days at most his converging armies would have joined hands in open country, and the great pursuit to the Rhine would begin.

So the offensive in Champagne was duly launched on April 16th after a long bombardment which served as a final announcement to the enemy of the attack about which they were amply informed already. By nightfall the French had advanced about six hundred yards instead of the six miles anticipated in Nivelle's programme. Everywhere the attacking troops had been trapped in the web of machine-gun fire. The Senegalese broke and fled, storming hospital trains in their anxiety to get away. That evening Nivelle reduced his effort, confining it to the sectors on either flank of the Chemin-des-Dames. After five days the only achievement was Mangin's capture of the projecting corner on the western flank ;

it gave the Germans a straighter line to defend ! Nivelle was now led to abandon his attempt to break through, having sacrificed 120,000 men in proving himself wrong. He now proposed to revert to partial attacks on the old model ; but he had lost the confidence of the army even more than of the country. His fate was justly if belatedly sealed.

To soothe the tumult and apply a brake to the offensive the Government appointed Pétain to be Chief of the French General Staff on April 28th. Fear of causing a bad impression abroad checked their desire to replace Nivelle outright. Many of the members wavered, especially when Nivelle broke his promise to resign when called on. But Painlevé stood firm ; backed by the Prime Minister, he obtained on May 11th Nivelle's dismissal and replacement by Pétain. The change was too late to avert an outbreak of mutiny that spread until sixteen army corps were infected ; a mutiny that was primarily due to the utter disillusionment of the fighting troops, who greeted orders for return to the line with such cries as, " We'll defend the trenches, but we won't attack."

Pétain was not long in restoring order. Confidence in his military common sense was at least as strong a restorative as the proofs he gave of his readiness to adjust petty grievances. But to restore the offensive-confidence of the troops was a harder task. If the sword of France was gradually resharpened under his superintendence, never again did it acquire the keen edge that had been so foolishly blunted. There was a tinge of irony in the fact that Nivelle's fall opened the way for Foch's return to power.

One of Painlevé's first acts on becoming Minister of War had been to send Foch on a mission to Italy. For his admiration of Foch's spirit was only second to his regard for Pétain's judgment. Foch's task was to discuss with Cadorna, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, how French and British reinforcements could intervene if the Italian Army suffered a dangerous attack, a contingency feared at the moment. On April 8th Foch met Cadorna at Vicenza, and carried out a combined study of the problem. The study was prophetic and the experience useful to Foch. But Nivelle does not seem to have approved of this emergency arrangement, made

on the Government's initiative, for he demanded that Foch should be recalled.

By the 15th Foch was back at Senlis. Never did he find inactivity more trying. For he returned on the eve of Nivelle's offensive, the first offensive of the war in which he had taken no part. He was merely a remote spectator. With a caustic humour he likened his own rôle to that "of Jérôme Paturot in search of a social position." Another time he jestingly said before setting out for a reception: "I shan't be cold; I've put on all my orders." But he felt the chill inwardly, for he was not the man to be consoled by decorations and dignity for the loss of real power. Yet in this time of neglect his fortitude did not fail him. Weygand relates that "to measure the greatness of his soul, one must have seen him in these sad moments. To the regrets, even to the indignation, that he heard expressed around him, he contented himself with saying, 'Let them go ahead,' accompanying his words with that gesture we all knew so well and with which he dismissed everything that he did not wish to see or know."

As a spectator Foch certainly proved a more accurate judge of the situation than as a commander. For he summed up the result of Nivelle's offensive with remarkable quickness. On April 17th, the very day after it was launched, Foch received a visit from Wilson, who had been with Castelnau in Russia, and had now come back to his old task of liaison. "We had a long talk. Foch was clear that Nivelle was done, owing chiefly to the failure of the Sixth Army [Mangin]. Foch said he knew that the positions which this army was told to attack were impossible—and after what I saw yesterday I agree. He thinks on all this work Nivelle will be *degommé* and Pétain put in his place, who will play a waiting game until the U.S.A. [who had declared war on April 6th] come on the scene, say a year hence. I asked about a central organisation of the Allies to really take hold, and he was all in favour of it and would love to be the French representative."

On May 6th they had a fresh talk, when Foch drove to Compiègne: "Foch came at 4.30 and spent 1½ hours with me. He is off to the Jura for a trip, and to spend his time. It is sinful that he is not C.-in-C. He is far the finest soldier in France, and in

remarkably good form and health. I asked Foch whether, if Russia made peace, would the French fight it out, and he said certainly, provided the Government gave a clear lead." The mutinies that were about to develop cast a reflection on Foch's assurance.

His absence of complaint at his own neglect is the more notable because he had just suffered a fresh disappointment. Pétain's appointment to be Chief of the Staff had left vacant the command of the centre group of armies, but Fayolle, Foch's erstwhile subordinate on the Somme, had been promoted to fill the post. Painlevé, however, had not forgotten Foch. At ten o'clock on the night of May 10th Foch was summoned by Painlevé, was told that Pétain was to succeed Nivelle, and was offered the post of Chief of the General Staff in Paris. By strange coincidence Wilson had been called to Paris that same evening by an urgent telephone appeal from Nivelle, who said that he had refused to resign and begged Wilson's help in defeating the intention of making Pétain Commander-in-Chief. Nivelle, like his predecessors, seems to have had a touching faith in Wilson's power of intrigue. But this time Wilson steered a middle course. It was fortunate, for his intervention might have had the ironical consequence of thwarting Foch's return to influence.

Foch himself did not jump at the offer. Painlevé has related that "his regret at having been removed from his armies of the north was still so keen that, if he had only been guided by his own taste, he would have preferred to be put at the head of a group of armies and that General Fayolle should be appointed Chief of the General Staff." But Painlevé and Pétain, "who did his utmost to support this choice," desired Foch to take the latter post because of his prestige with the Allies, feeling that he could there serve the cause of France better than in a direct command. Foch gave way to this wish and the appointment was made on May 15th.

He thus became the technical adviser of the Government. By his proximity no less than by his personality his influence steadily grew, imperceptibly encroaching on that of the Commander-in-Chief, more distant both in place and in manner. But it would

be long ere the shifting balance of power became manifest, for Foch shared Pétain's view of the immediate situation and wholeheartedly supported his measures. "*Long, dur, sûr*" had become his favourite phrase in speaking of the war. It was only in his emphasis on the last word that the old Foch survived and the new Foch differed from his surroundings.

Over France lay a grey cloud of depression and defeatism, ominously tinged with the red light of mutiny. And the outlook abroad was full of menace. Over the narrow seas that girt Britain lay the dark pall of the German submarine blockade, now at its worst, and not for several months would the danger of collapse through starvation disperse. In Russia the outlook was dangerously bright, because bright red. That danger, unlike the others, would wax, not wane. In October the overthrow of moderate revolutionary government by the Bolsheviks would be the final and fatal stroke that deprived the Western Allies of their chief partner. Thus, while they were deprived of Russia's aid, their enemy's forces in the East would be released for use in the West.

The one gleam of light on the dark horizon was the entry of the United States into the war. That accession would have early effect in tightening the grip of the naval blockade on Germany, and also in helping to loosen the German submarine blockade on Britain. And while it ensured Germany's eventual economic collapse, so it secured the Allies' badly strained economic position, enabling them to purchase the munitions which American factories were turning out in ever-larger quantity. But, in proportion to America's bulk, the American Army was so small as to suggest the début in the battle arena of a giant armed with a penknife. Although that little army would become the frame on which a great host was raised, its influence on the situation in France was still far distant.

One of the earliest effects of the discussions between Painlevé, Pétain, and Foch was the decision to ask that America would place a million men in France within a year. Painlevé greeted Pershing, the American Commander-in-Chief, with this request and proposal when he arrived in Paris on June 15th. And

Pershing, rising to the occasion, sent a cable that staggered the War Department in Washington, still thinking of a limited liability war.

With this ultimate reinforcement as the basis of his thought, Pétain proposed to postpone any large-scale offensive until July, 1918, regarding any premature attempt as both useless and dangerous. He would remain steadfastly on the defensive until conditions were ripe for the fulfilment of his far-sighted plan, making only such local attacks as lent themselves to a certain coup at small cost. Any other policy, he considered, would hinder the delicate task of resharpening his sword.

Foch, the erstwhile spirit of the offensive, agreed with Pétain. He had shed some of his illusions. "After the shock of April 16th, to imagine that in a few months the French Army will be capable of renewing the offensive on the same scale is to have no sense of possibilities."

The new military combination set on foot a fourfold programme of munition development, embracing aircraft, heavy artillery, tanks, and gas shells. It is significant, however, that the order for 3,000 light tanks was due to the clear vision of Pétain in face of the opposition of the General Staff. They were to prove the key instrument in the great counter-stroke of July, 1918. Wilson at the same time was begging Churchill "not to bother his head about mechanical details as to the best form of tank, and rubbish of that sort."

The British leaders did not care for this plan of postponement and preparation for 1918. They viewed it as an example, not of bold vision, but short-sighted hesitation. Wilson spoke of "the Pétain school of squatting and doing nothing." Haig and Robertson were even more opposed to such a waiting strategy. Although the British offensive at Arras on April 9th had soon faded into impotence after a hopeful start, Haig persisted in fruitless assaults until early in May. Then, seeing that the French were unlikely to resume their offensive, he decided to fulfil a long-cherished plan and transfer the weight of his offensive to Flanders.

After the failure of this Flanders offensive the excuse loudly proclaimed was that it had been delivered on French appeal to

take the pressure off the French. But in fact there was no pressure on the French, and the Germans had neither the means nor the intention of taking the offensive until reserves were released by Russia's collapse. For the pretext even there is no justification. As early as May 11th Pétain intimated that he was "opposed to Haig's plans of attack," and on May 20th he told Wilson "that, in his opinion, Haig's attack towards Ostend was certain to fail, and that his effort to disengage Ostend and Zeebrugge was a hopeless one."

The offensive urge of the British had a dual source. One was, certainly, the belief of Haig and Robertson that the offensive had a probability of success; they showed an unmistakable alacrity in taking up the burden which their Allies were anxious to lay down. The other source was the pressure of the German submarine blockade. Its grip was too close for the British leaders to sit still with comfort, and under its irksome pressure reason gave way to instinct—to the instinct of doing anything rather than sitting still. Thus they convinced themselves that by counter-action on land they might loosen the pressure at sea. And thus the world had the strange spectacle, as a neutral remarked, "of the greatest sea-power making its chief effort on land, while the greatest land-power made its chief effort at sea."

Lloyd George, who had been carried to power by a cry for a more vigorous conduct of the war, was naturally anxious to justify his words. But he declared that he must first be convinced of the wisdom of an offensive, whereupon Robertson and Wilson "both drew up papers for the Prime Minister's information, advocating that course." On cooler reflection and after a talk with Foch, Lloyd George subsequently tried in vain to check the strategy he had countenanced. Haig and Robertson held on with bull-dog tenacity.

On June 2nd Wilson met Foch, who condemned the offensive plan in forceful terms. "He wanted to know who it was who wanted Haig to go on a 'duck's march through the inundations to Ostend and Zeebrugge.' He thinks the whole thing futile, fantastic, and dangerous. . . ." Foch also told Wilson "that Pétain did not particularly want" him to continue as principal

liaison officer between the Allied headquarters. Wilson then mentioned a proposal that he should go as military adviser to the British Embassy in Paris, and was hurt to find that Foch was opposed to such a step. "So he does not want me—and he really is my friend." Shaken by this mark of lost confidence in himself, Wilson quickly developed strong doubts about an offensive strategy. It is fair to add that they were confirmed by a trip he made through the French countryside and by a meeting with Clemenceau, who surprised him by saying that he "liked Pétain just because he would not attack." He also learnt from Foch that the form of help the French wanted was for Haig not to take the offensive, but to take over more of the defensive front, "as both the Army and France are tired out."

Yet on his forlorn way back to England and temporary unemployment, Wilson told Haig that he "was absolutely convinced that we should attack all we could." It is difficult to see any other motive in this "conviction" than that of ingratiating himself with a man who was obstinately set on pursuing the offensive.

On June 7th a neat preliminary stroke, as long in preparation as it was quick in execution, had cut away the small salient formed by the enemy's position on the Messines Ridge. Nearly two months passed before the main offensive from Ypres was ready, and the enemy had ample warning to prepare counter-measures. On July 31st the offensive was at last launched. The incessant bombardments broke up the drainage system and the land reverted to swamp—as experts had predicted. Repeated days of heavy rain completed the discomfiture of the attackers. After three dreadful months the offensive foundered in the swamps of Passchendaele. In proportion to its duration the vain cost had been even higher than that of the Somme offensive. If the enemy's resistance was strained, the British strength was so worn down that the effects can be traced in the collapse of the following spring.

The most apt British comment on the offensive was supplied by the man who was largely responsible for inciting Haig to persevere with it. Having quitted the dry seclusion of G.H.Q.

to pay his first visit to the battlefield, when the months-long battle was ended, he burst into tears, exclaiming: "Good God, did we really send men to fight in that?" The most apt French comment came from the man of most experience in futile offensives, Foch himself: "*Boche* is bad and *bonne* is bad; but *Boche* and *bonne* together—— Ah!"

Only when his offensive had foundered did Haig sanction the trial of a new method—the long-advocated mass of tanks method—in a new and more propitious sector. This surprise stroke at Cambrai on November 20th made a deep gash in the German front with astonishing ease and quickness. But there were no reserves to pour through the gap—they had been sunk in the cesspool of Passchendaele.

On August 6th, a week after Haig's offensive began, Foch came over to London with Ribot and Painlevé for a conference. There he took the line that the chief concern should be to prepare for the campaign of 1918 and, above all, to "hasten the creation of an American Army and its transport to France." He advocated a "simple defence of secondary fronts," but favoured a revival of the project, long buried in Kitchener's watery grave, of an expedition to Alexandretta to cut the railway life-line of the Turkish Armies in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Foch was willing to reduce the force at Salonika when Greek divisions were ready to help in its defence, but was opposed to the evacuation desired by Robertson, regarding such a step as a foolish sacrifice of the Balkan allies. He had so far shed his military scholasticism as to feel irritation at the way Robertson, like Haig and his Chief of Staff, Kiggell, harped with pedantic reiteration on the maxim of "superior forces at the decisive point." It sounded all the more unreal when employed to justify the bull-at-a-gate concentration in Flanders.

When, however, Lloyd George urged the dispatch of French and British reinforcements to Italy for a powerful combined blow against the Austrians, as Cadorna had earlier proposed, Foch was sceptical of its value, and considered that it would be too late in the season. The resolute opposition of Robertson and Haig killed the scheme. The reinforcements would eventually

be sent, but to retrieve disaster, not to reinforce success. We may doubt whether such success was attainable, but there is little room for doubt that an offensive thus reinforced, if delivered in time, would have forestalled the enemy's offensive and averted its disastrous consequences.

While in London Foch naturally saw his old friend, Henry Wilson, whose widely scattered hints that he was "inclined to go in for mischief" had not yet procured him employment. Foch told Wilson much that had passed at the conference, but seems to have kept silence about his own chief proposal, that of creating a "permanent inter-Allied military organ" to obtain unity of action. Painlevé, well coached, had a long discussion with Lloyd George and Lord Milner on August 6th in which he urged "the nomination of General Foch as Chief of an inter-Allied General Staff." Lloyd George expressed his agreement, but remarked that in this view he and Lord Milner were "almost alone in the Government, in Parliament, as in the Army." "It was necessary to be patient, to leave him time to prepare opinion." Foch's undisguised disgust at the ineffectiveness of the conference may be traced in part to this postponement of his project. But events came to his relief.

For the moment he had a distraction in another task, that of sitting in judgment on Nivelle. In response to French Parliamentary demand, a military Commission of Enquiry into the conduct of the ill-fated offensive was appointed. Brugère was president, and the other members were Foch and Gouraud. Some of Foch's general comments were drastic. He spoke of the attempt as being "so obviously chimerical," and scornfully remarked that "the Government had sought the light, but its eyes remained closed." In taking such a line of indirect criticism he revealed the common military tendency to shift the blame to political shoulders. And when it came to passing judgment he declined to sign the president's verdict that "for the preparation as for the execution of this offensive, General Nivelle was not equal to the overwhelming task he had assumed." Foch seems to have been guided by loyalty to a fellow-soldier rather than to the truth, and the conjoint report of the commission, rendered in

October, was a confused compromise between the members' disapproval of the offensive and their reluctance to disavow the soldiers who were responsible for it.

In embarrassed perplexity at the report Painlevé asked Foch what was "the practical meaning of its conclusions." With characteristic curtness Foch answered: "For Mangin, an army corps to begin with, and as soon as possible. For Nivelles, an army, but much later, much later, when he's calmed down."

The question was asked as Foch was about to leave for Italy to grapple with a more urgent problem. This was itself the outcome of a pressing danger on the enemy's side. The Austrians, feeling unable to stand the strain of resisting another Italian offensive, had appealed to Ludendorff, who sent his slender general reserve of six divisions to strike a sudden blow at the Italians. A weak sector was chosen near Caporetto. On October 24th it was pierced by a surprise thrust delivered beneath a cloak of mist. The German blade went in so deeply as to sever vital arteries, and with dramatic swiftness the front of the Italian Second Army collapsed. His centre thus broken through, Cadorna only saved his wings by a precipitate retreat from the Venetian salient to the line of the Piave, leaving a quarter of a million men prisoners in the enemy's hand. On the map the Venetian salient between the Alps and the Adriatic has the giant outline of a clenched fist pointing to Austria; the line of the Piave forms the wrist; the possibility of holding it was complicated by the danger of an overreaching blow on the forearm from the Trentino. Fortunately for the Allies, the enemy, surprised by the astounding success of their own light thrust, lacked reserves to execute such a new blow—in force. And help to the hard-pressed Italians was on the way—from France.

Foch had risen to the emergency quicker and better than his British *vis-à-vis*. The extent of the Italian disaster became known on the 26th. After consultation with Foch, Painlevé telegraphed an offer of help that crossed Cadorna's appeal. Pétain unhesitatingly made ready four divisions. In contrast, Robertson at first demurred. A telegram was sent to Paris saying that he considered that the dispatch of troops beyond the Alps, at a moment when it

was not even sure whether an Italian Army still existed, was an imprudence for which he was not willing to accept responsibility. His hand was forced by the arrival of a fresh telegram from Painlevé and Foch, which said that the French divisions were going whether the British went or not. Robertson then, with a characteristic grunt, accepted the inevitable and arranged to dispatch two divisions forthwith.

Foch here showed a more far-sighted wisdom, arguing that : " It is indisputable that General Cadorna has all that is necessary in the way of munitions, troops, and lines of resistance for stopping the enemy. . . . But events are more powerful than arguments. It is to the Allies' interests to prevent the Italian disaster from growing larger at any cost. They must, therefore, without any delay, support the Italian Army both morally and materially."

Foch himself left Paris by train on the 28th, and early on the 30th met Cadorna at Treviso. He learnt that the Italian Armies were already falling back behind the Tagliamento, and would probably have to continue their retreat to the Piave. The possibility of holding even this line would soon become precarious. In such confused conditions Foch was loth to push the French reinforcements into " the mêlée," especially when he learnt that there were signs of an Austrian descent from the Trentino on the Italian rear. To guard against this danger Foch arranged to detrain the French reinforcements at Brescia and Verona instead of further forward.

Meantime, as at Ypres in 1914, he characteristically sought to stiffen the Italian resistance by phrases and gesture. The pride of the Italians, not so used to his ways as the British and Belgians, was bruised by his whirlwind manner. Perhaps there was some lack of tact in his reported exhortation to Cadorna : " It is not with water lines that you will defend Italy, but with the breasts of your soldiers." And the King of Italy, like the King of Belgium earlier, might well feel hurt when his assertion that he would fight to the bitter end, even if his armies had to retreat to Sicily, was met by the curt reply : " There is no question of retreating to Sicily ; it's on the Piave that we've got to resist." Again, Foch's popularity among the sensitive Italians was not increased when another

of his comments was bruited : " The Italian front was a wall ; not of stone, however, but of clay, and when it began to rain——!!" The point of his parables was not always so clear.

After a brief call on the Duc d'Aosta, commanding the Third Army, Foch had gone on to Rome, where he spent several exhortatory days. Robertson, who had followed him out to Italy, had already arrived in Rome. And Robertson was the forerunner of a greater pilgrimage to Italy, the purpose of which was helped by Robertson's departure from England.

The project of forming an inter-Allied organ of war control, so long simmering, had been brought to the boil a fortnight before Caporetto. The disaster proved a good opportunity of pouring the brew into the cup of public opinion. Painlevé left for London, to reach a final accord with Lloyd George, the day after Robertson left London. The Supreme War Council was to consist of the Prime Minister and a second Minister from each country, which would also supply a permanent military representative for advice and the framing of plans. One outstanding detail to be settled was the seat of the Council. The British objected to the choice of Paris ; so Versailles was selected as a compromise. Another difficulty arose over the choice of the military advisers. Painlevé wished Foch to be the French representative without ceasing to be Chief of the General Staff. This did not suit Lloyd George, whose purpose was to create a strategic agent capable of overruling his own Chief of the General Staff, Robertson, whose narrowness of outlook he so much distrusted. Wilson had used his time at home to such advantage that he became Lloyd George's nominee. And with remarkable elasticity he had recanted his own ultra-Western Front faith for a wider conception adjusted to the Prime Minister's.

The discussion of this difficulty was resumed at Rapallo, whither the French and British statesmen now travelled to meet their Italian colleagues. Foch, on arrival from Rome, urged Painlevé to a fresh effort to the end that he should maintain the double function. But Lloyd George stood firm, insisting that the military representatives must preserve the power of independent judgment. He neatly turned the scales by the remark : " Person-

ally, I should feel a real chagrin if I could not feel that General Foch is as much the adviser of the British as of the French Government." Hence on the 7th the Pact of Rapallo was signed, and the Supreme War Council came into being.

Another result of the conference was the removal of Cadorna from command. Foch had strongly pressed this point, and proposed the Duc d'Aosta, but Diaz was the Italian choice. A man who understood the human nature of the soldier, he was to do for the Italian Army what Pétain had done for the French, to renew its spirit by inspiring confidence in his mingled sympathy and practical good sense. But his first experience was disconcerting. Foch, Weygand and Wilson arrived at Padua, the Italian headquarters, to find that the new Commander-in-Chief was not yet installed. He arrived early on the 9th, without personal staff or baggage, and after an all-night journey, to meet a triple cross-examination as to his plans and dispositions—before he had time to make any. In such trying conditions serenity of mood was not easy to achieve. Thus when Foch addressed him with his customary vigour of language, Diaz began to show resentment. Wilson, always at his best in troubled waters, succeeded in restoring tranquillity.

Diaz assured the Allied generals of his intention to hold the line of the Piave at all costs. But it was easier said than done. The Montello and Monte Grappa sectors on his left flank were special danger-points. Wilson thought that the Italians would have to fall back, but Foch handed Diaz one of his characteristic notes in First Ypres style. A heated argument took place on the 11th. Diaz declared that the best way to ensure the retention of these sectors was for the French divisions to come forward, and read out a telegram from his Prime Minister which said that "public opinion [in Italy] is already unfavourably impressed by the fact that the Allied armies are being kept back so far from danger." Foch, however, this time did not intend to use his "mud" for filling up any walls "of clay." He refused to move his troops forward along roads encumbered with transport and fugitives. He wished to hold them ready to counter-attack in case of another break-through.

There was a fresh discussion next day. Wilson noted in his diary: "Foch and Weygand began to settle the dates of detraining my four divisions, and to their entire satisfaction they had the whole four detrained by the 19th. I refused to take part in building these 'Castles in the Air,' as I called them to Diaz, who was quite sensible. And, funnily enough, a couple of hours later Cavan sent me a wire to say his second division would not be completed till about 22nd or 23rd. I sent Foch a copy."

Wilson left for England on the 17th, but Foch remained. Next day he received from the Italian headquarters a bundle of papers which dealt with the measures to be taken if a retreat to the line of the Po and the Mincio became necessary. Foch seems to have jumped to the conclusion that this natural precaution meant a definite intention to retreat. He bombarded Diaz with vigorous protests and handed him another note, which began: "The exclusive idea that ought to animate every combatant is that of not abandoning another yard of his country's soil." For the next few days he continued his exhortations to every Italian general and Minister he met, until on the 23rd he heard and responded to the stronger call of Paris. It was over a week later before the French and British troops took over a part of the front. Both were left in peace. Thus it was solely by their own efforts that the Italian troops, if aided by the enemy's difficulties, had held the line of the Piave and brought the invasion to a standstill. Foch had certainly applied his customary moral suasion to the Italian command. It is doubtful whether the effect was more influential than on the British at Ypres, although the irritation was greater. And while he had done his best to send troops to "putty up" the British line, he had sent none into the Italian line.

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On his return to France he found a new situation. Painlevé's Government had fallen on one of the trivial issues familiar in French politics. The Rapallo Pact, which could not show the achievement of a French command over the Allied armies, had not generated sufficient enthusiasm to offset the minor grievances which swayed votes in the Parliamentary debate. And the result

was that Clemenceau, so long the ferocious critic of Governments, came to assume the reins of government.

He showed little enthusiasm for the Supreme War Council, regarding it as yet another of the committees that he abhorred, and a potential danger to French direction of the war. At first he seems to have thought of altering its composition so that both Pétain and Foch would attend in their French official capacities. This would have meant that Haig and Robertson, similarly, represented the British military element, an idea not to the taste of Lloyd George, and still less to that of Wilson, who would have been cast adrift once more just as he had found a secure anchorage.

Ultimately Clemenceau chose a subtler line. He appointed Weygand to be the French representative, while Foch remained Chief of the General Staff. The British, not unnaturally, regarded this step as designed to make the Versailles Military Committee a vocal organ of the French General Staff, which in turn Clemenceau himself would control. And their influence would be the more weakened because their representative, Wilson, was chosen with the idea not merely that he should be independent but as a rival influence to that of Robertson. During the first months of its existence the members of the Supreme War Council spent more time in pulling wires than in pulling together.

Sometimes this mutual distrust had its humorous side—and asides. One such incident bore testimony to Foch's sense of humour. The French had suggested that their shorthand writer would suffice to provide notes of the discussion for all the representatives. Wilson at once leant across the table towards the American representative, General Bliss, and said, between cupped hands, "We can't have that. We must insist on our own shorthand men." Then, turning to Foch, he asked: "Did you hear what I said?" Foch either had not, or pretended not to have, understood. Whereupon Wilson, with impish candour, said: "Well, I was telling him that we couldn't agree to that—that we don't trust you little Frenchmen for a moment." Foch burst into laughter, enjoying the joke against himself. There was always the element of a game in the inter-Allied battles of wits, and it

would be a mistake historically to treat all their wrangles too seriously.

But while the Allies were manœuvring for position across the council table, the enemy were preparing a manœuvre in deadlier earnest. Since early in November the stream of German troop-trains from east to west had been steadily swelling, and more rapidly after Russia's capitulation. When the 1917 campaign began there had been a proportion of nearly three Allies to two Germans on the Western Front. By the end of January, 1918, the Germans had the preponderance. The number of their divisions had risen to 177, with 30 more to come, whereas the Allied strength had fallen to 164, excluding the 4 American divisions that had now reached France.

The full gravity of the menace was not universally appreciated, although there was a sudden fall in the temperature of British military opinion at the end of the year. It was natural that the British Cabinet should be slow in adjusting themselves to the change, after they had had such long and such recent treatment with offensive heat-rays from their military advisers. It was equally natural that they should derive reassurance from the recollection of how often their own offensives had failed despite greater superiority of force. The unfortunate consequence was that they withheld reinforcements for fear of encouraging fresh squandering of lives.

Pétain, in contrast, was as quick as he was sure in gauging the situation. He had again emphasised, in November, that the Allies should adopt a waiting strategy until the summer of 1918, when the programme of American man-power and French munitions would be fulfilled.

The immediate problem was how he could hold on until that time. And to this end he insisted that the British should extend their frontage as far as Berry au Bac, at the eastern end of the Chemin des Dames. In proportion to the respective strengths of the British and French armies, it was not an unreasonable request. And it seems the less so in the light of our present knowledge that the German leaders were divided in opinion as to whether their blow should be made against Verdun or against the British front.

Against Pétain's arguments, strongly supported by Clemenceau, the British could only argue that they had to hold the most vital and dangerous sector, covering the Channel ports and so close to the sea as to leave no room to swing back if the line was broken. As Haig stubbornly opposed any extension further than the Oise, Clemenceau and Lloyd George agreed, on Wilson's initiative, to refer the dispute to the Versailles Committee. Wilson joyfully confided to his diary: "This is an epoch-making decision, because it really calls Versailles into being as the supreme advisory (military) body, and as the supreme executive body also. I told the Tiger that I thought well of him and liked him, and he said he liked me too!" Wilson was still more flattered when Clemenceau declared that the Versailles Committee was really "Monsieur Wilson." Wilson would soon find that he was merely being made a cat's-paw—more exactly, a Tiger's paw.

The Versailles Committee duly arranged a compromise by which Haig was to take over approximately half of the distance in dispute between the Oise and Berry au Bac. Haig and Robertson offered strong objection. And about a week later Wilson was suddenly surprised to hear that Haig had gone direct to Pétain and arranged a settlement by which he was to extend his front only as far as Barisis, just south of the Oise. This was a noteworthy concession on Pétain's part, and one that in retrospect does honour to his spirit of helpfulness. It meant that Haig's total extension of front would only be some fourteen miles. In the light of this fact the subsequent attempt to attribute the British breakdown to the extension of the front shrivels into absurdity. So does the argument that Haig was forced by the politicians to stretch his front beyond his resources and against his will.

This question of frontage settled, another came into the foreground of debate—that of combined action in face of the impending German blow. Once more the British provided the obstacle. As far back as November Pétain had argued that "unity of command is one of the conditions of success," and that a supreme chief should be appointed to settle plans and control reserves. He showed a most creditable readiness to subordinate his own authority, provided that the limits of a higher control were clearly

defined. In May he had advocated Foch's appointment as Chief of the General Staff, although it would inevitably limit his own power. At the end of October he had gone specially to London to assure Lloyd George of his approval of a superior inter-Allied organ and of Foch's appointment to it. At the end of November he supported the proposal made by the American representatives, Colonel House and General Bliss, to give the Versailles Military Committee executive powers and an executive head. Against a background so darkly shaded with personal ambitions Pétain's self-abnegation stands out in bright relief. The only shadow upon it is national, not personal—the reflection that he well knew that only a Frenchman was likely to become the executive head. And in this same certainty lies both the cause and the reasonable justification of the British opposition. It was a case of "Heads, I win ; tails, you lose."

Henry Wilson energetically fostered the proposal, which he made his own, for a central reserve. If one may grant his willingness to abnegate national claims, one cannot ascribe to him personal disinterestedness. He was much vexed when Robertson, coming over to Versailles, so far embraced the proposal as to claim that he and Foch should control the reserve. Next day, February 2nd, the Allied ministers duly created the Executive Board to control a general inter-Allied reserve. Its members were to be the original military representatives, save that Clemenceau replaced Weygand by Foch, who would, furthermore, preside over the Board. This appointment virtually made Foch generalissimo, and in his own eyes the long-sought goal seemed to have been reached. Joffre's claims had been canvassed as an alternative choice, but the idea of his resurrection was summarily extinguished by Clemenceau's declaration that he would not have Joffre at any price.

Joyfully hailing the creation of the Board, Wilson that night noted in his diary : "Robertson fought to the last to be on it, but was badly beaten. I wonder will he resign ?" The anticipation was realised after some days of domestic crisis in the British Cabinet. Wilson expressed his willingness to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff and let Robertson go to

Versailles as his subordinate, or to remain at Versailles and be independent of Robertson. A truly double concession! The eventual decision was that Wilson became Chief of the General Staff, Robertson was put in a gilded isolation cell at home, and Rawlinson was sent to Versailles—where before long he imitated his predecessor's claim in running counter to the Chief of the General Staff!

The two main questions that the Executive Board had to settle were those of the plan for 1918 and the formation of the general reserve. The first was abstract and remained abstract. The second was concrete and became dust.

Foch's proffered solution was the one we should expect. Recognising that a German offensive was probable, he argued that "we ought to meet it by an attitude which, far from being passive, should be inspired by the determination of the Entente Armies to seize every opportunity to impose their will upon the adversary. This can only be achieved by assuming the offensive the moment it is possible." If the enemy attacked, they should "not only stop him and counter-attack in the zone of his attack," but should themselves launch offensives in other parts of the front. If the enemy did not attack, they should themselves take the initiative with attacks against limited objectives in order to "wear him down and maintain the fighting spirit of our troops." In both cases the Allies should be ready to develop "a combined offensive with decisive objectives" at the first favourable moment. When Weygand submitted Foch's plan to the Versailles Committee, on January 21st, its other members were inclined to accept Wilson's counter-argument that neither side could gain an advantage in France during 1918, and that the Allies therefore should concentrate on an effort to destroy the Turkish armies. Weygand, in the end, persuaded them to adopt Foch's view. Foch himself then took up with Haig and Pétain his idea of an offensive antidote to the enemy's offensive. At a conference on the 24th he cited the example of 1916: "The German offensive at Verdun was stopped not by our resistance there but by our offensive on the Somme. Such an operation is only possible when foreseen and prepared beforehand." He added that, in

planning it, "the entire front must be considered as a whole, not the French as one part and the British as another. The plan must envisage them preparing together for offensive action on a common battlefield."

Pétain replied that the situation was different from 1916. The Germans had sufficient force to "attack at three points simultaneously or successively, and at each point the attack can be more violent than at Verdun." "When they attack at one point, are we then to launch a counter-attack?" If so, he argued, the enemy's next stroke might find the Allies without reserves ready to meet it.

Foch then said that to prepare such a counter-offensive did not imply that one was committed to any fixed moment for its delivery. But a large-scale operation was better than local counter-attacks. To this Pétain retorted that while he agreed in principle he had not the reserves to spare for such a purpose. Haig interjected: "Give us back the troops from Salonika and we'll begin offensives."

The French and British commanders agreed that they could do no more than arrange for local counterstrokes, and that anything larger must depend on the arrival of American reserves. Pershing, who was present, thereupon took the opportunity to emphasise that the American Army must have its own front "as an independent force and would not be used merely as a reserve to be sent here and there." After stating that the arrival of American troops depended on the amount of sea-transport provided, he complained of French failures to furnish rail facilities and military equipment.

Foch, showing surprise, remarked, "None of these questions has been referred to me," whereupon Pétain interjected: "One should not wait until such things are brought to one's attention, but should look around and discover them." But such practical details, as we have seen and Pershing learnt, did not come within the orbit of Foch's thought. Analysis of the earlier years forestalls any surprise at the revelation made by Pershing in his memoirs: "Foch never seemed interested when I talked with him of our problems, and I doubt whether at the time he ever

thought, knew, or cared much about our organisation or our questions of supply and transport."

If the argument about American help served no other purpose, it quenched any hope of Pétain and Haig sparing the reserves to fulfil Foch's project. Thus disappointed, he relieved his feelings by the comment: "In that case, we have only prepared palliatives to meet the enemy's offensive; we have no ample, vigorous counterstrokes ready."

He was not content to accept the rebuff, however, and he took up his proposal anew at the meeting of the Supreme War Council on February 2nd. It also made him there advocate with increased vehemence the necessity of a general reserve under an executive head. This time he gained his way and, as we have related, he was appointed to preside over the Executive Board. But it would seem that his known intention of using the general reserve for offensive purposes was a factor in leading Haig and Pétain to resist its creation. While friction with G.Q.G. had been aggravated by the way Foch's entourage had pressed his claims to supreme control, actual jealousy of Foch's growing influence appears to have been confined to some of Pétain's staff, and his own opposition to have sprung purely from a mistrust of the strategy which Foch now advocated.

Wilson meantime was playing at Versailles a war game of which he gave repeated performances to the Allied statesmen and generals. He liked one part of his staff to wear their caps turned round with peak at the back to represent the enemy, and to help them to get into the enemy's mind. It was not the first time Wilson had believed in the magic power of a foreign headdress. In the war game he showed to his own satisfaction, and the apparent admiration of his visitors, that the Germans would launch their attack in June—to meet inevitable repulse—on a front between La Bassée and Cambrai. When the German attack actually came, on March 21st, only its right wing would touch this sector, and then only the southern part of it. The northern part, curiously, was the one part of the whole British front which the enemy never attacked during the year. It deserves mention that Haig's Intelligence branch, with more accuracy, anticipated

the attack in March, and on the St. Quentin front, although the weight and width of the blow were under-estimated. This under-estimate partly explains why Rawlinson found Haig so "full of confidence."

The Executive Board at Versailles fixed the strength of the general reserve at 30 divisions, of which 13 or 14 were to be French, 9 or 10 to be British, and 7 to be Italian. The total would thus be roughly one-seventh of the Allied forces, and the various national contingents were, in principle, to be posted within the zone of their own armies. But when, on February 6th, Foch asked the Commanders-in-Chief for their contributions, difficulties began. Diaz agreed to earmark 6 divisions, only one less than his quota. Pétain made stronger objection, and when he proposed to reduce his quota to 8 divisions Foch gave way with surprisingly little resistance. Haig was a worse obstacle, and in face of his resistance the dream creation collapsed.

He let it be known at once that he would resign rather than give up any of his 57 divisions, many of which were still under strength since the autumn offensive. But he did not send any direct answer until nearly a month had passed. Then, on March 2nd, in answer to Foch's request for a written statement, he sent a definite refusal, saying that he had made his dispositions to meet an offensive, had assigned all his divisions accordingly, and could spare none for the general reserve. He offered, however, a general criticism of the Executive Board, its forecast, and its plan. In delivering this crushing counterstroke, he relied on strong support. For not only was he aware of Pétain's objections, and backed by Rawlinson at Versailles, but he had gained the sympathetic ear of the Tiger himself. Clemenceau had been to stay with Haig, had been impressed by his readiness to resign rather than surrender any divisions, and appreciated Haig's dislike of command by committee. But it has been suggested that his readiness to adopt Haig's view was inspired by a deeper motive, fostered by his own military cabinet—that of giving a fresh application to the Roman maxim "divide and rule."

Confronted with Haig's refusal, Foch determined to make an appeal to the Supreme War Council, which met in London on

March 14th—seven days before the German blow fell. On arrival in London he also tried, unsuccessfully, to induce Wilson to give Haig an order to contribute his quota.

When the Council met, Foch put forward his request and Haig gave his reasons for refusing it. Lloyd George was unwilling to put any pressure on him, and a resolution was drafted that while no divisions in France should form part of the general reserve, the Allied divisions in Italy should be considered as a nucleus of it. If this saved the face of the Executive Board it also made its power a farce. Clemenceau, however, promptly accepted the resolution—without giving Foch a chance to reply. When Foch tried to protest, Clemenceau curtly said: "Be quiet. I'm the representative of France." All that Foch could do was to deliver the thrust at Clemenceau: "The question before the meeting was apparently to organise an Executive Committee, but it looks as though the first thing done was to deprive that Committee of all power to execute."

He left the meeting and retired to his tent of Achilles at the Ritz—not to sulk, but to draft a long and energetic declaration of protest. But, after a talk with Wilson, he shortened it. At the end of the second day's meeting he raised his voice to demand that his formal protest that nothing was ready to meet the German offensive, and the Executive Committee powerless, should be recorded in the minutes. Then, in bitterness and foreboding, he left on his journey back to Paris. Never during the war, save in the brief Nivelle interlude, had he been relegated to such a state of powerlessness.

Chapter XVI

THE STORM BREAKS

WITH the coming of darkness on the evening of March 20th, the patchy day-long ground mist deepened and spread into a thick fog that enveloped the downland of Picardy. Before the sun sank it had become a veiled red orb, as baleful and mysterious as the hush that settled along the battle front. The men in faded khaki with steel soup-plates on their heads who stood in one front line, a line now designedly reduced to a chain of observation posts, could see little and hear little. Over the shrouded span of No Man's Land sooted and sank the years' unending, now unrevealing, chain of Verey lights. But up the roads behind the other front line were marching innumerable columns of men in field grey with dark and heavy coal-scuttle helmets of steel that gave them the air of mailed ghosts from the Middle Ages.

At differing times during the hours before midnight a cryptic warning order—"Prepare for attack"—reached the troops who held the menaced front of Gough's Fifth Army, prolonged northward past Arras by Byng's Third Army. In so peaceful a stillness the message would have seemed incredible had not the stillness been so ominously unnatural. The hours of darkness now became hours of tense waiting.

Luckless those whose lot had cast them on this night to be in the observation line or in the forward line of resistance a few hundred yards further back; luckier seemed, yet no luckier proved, those who were assigned to the circular redoubts that, in successive layers to the rear, formed the battle stations of the battalion reserves and of the brigades in support.

These received the urgent message "Man battle stations"

about half-past four on the chill morning of March 21st. They tumbled out of cellars and broken barns into the fog, now suddenly and fantastically riven by the multiple flash of exploding shells. More dangerous still was the stealthy pit-pat fall of countless gas-shells in the enveloping gloom. With the crash of over four thousand guns a storm broke over the British front which in grandeur of scale, of awe, and destruction, surpassed any other in the war.

For two hours the German guns concentrated on the British artillery positions and rear zones. Then, reinforced by mortars, the weight of the bombardment was brought back to the task of smashing the trenches to pulp. The ground quivered continuously, and spouting fountains of earth flew skyward, carrying human debris. The sunken trench floors were heaved up volcanically until the shell-holes themselves offered more cover than what had been trenches. Paralysed by the concussion, yet with nerves ever more on the rack, the survivors crouched unseeing and unheard. Almost all telephone cables were severed, wireless sets destroyed, while the fog made visual signals impossible even when the wan daylight came. Thus the front line was overpowered and overrun in many places without the fact being known to those in rear. Soon the redoubts were encircled by wraith-like forms, that cleverly infiltrated through the gaps and pushed more deeply onwards, leaving to fresh waves of field-grey the task of submerging the islets of the defence.

The fortune of the fog favoured these new German tactics, and by midday the British forward zone was swamped almost everywhere. But with midday came a lifting of the mist which had hitherto blindfolded the defending guns and machine-guns. When darkness came the battle zone was still unbroken along most of the front. But at three points on Gough's front the German tide had percolated through, and in the fog that again enveloped the battlefield next morning these breaches crumbled more deeply and widely.

On the evening of the 22nd Gough ordered a general retirement to the line of the upper Somme. Once the fortified crust was broken, control lapsed. The very complexity of the system

of communication built up during static warfare made the flux greater. In the confusion the bridge-heads at Péronne and Ham were lost, uncovering both Gough's flanks. On his left a gap opened between his army and Byng's. On his right an even more dangerous if narrower crack developed at the joint where he hinged on to the French. The danger grew as Gough's front caved in further and further, eaten away by the German flood that crept onward until by March 28th it was not only lapping the edge of Amiens but overlapping this city on the south. The "inundation" of the British front was over fifty miles wide and nearly forty miles deep.

A prime factor in the German success had been their revival of surprise—the master-key to open any barred gate in war. If Ludendorff had conscientiously pursued surprise in the infantry tactics, artillery arrangements, and, above all, by the lavish use of gas- and smoke-shell, he owed it even more to the luck of the weather. For here, as in almost all the successful strokes of 1914-18, nature had lent the matador's cloak beneath which the thrust had been delivered. It was the cloak of mist that enabled the attack to break into and percolate through the defending front. When this had been achieved, the Germans' well-oiled method of pushing in reserves at the points of least resistance prevented their opponents from repairing the breaches in time.

Many of the excuses subsequently advanced by British military spokesmen for the collapse will not bear reasoned examination. We have already noted the fallacious significance ascribed to the extension of the British front. Weight of numbers was another plea. The Germans launched 35 divisions against 21. These were not excessive odds, and were much less than in previous Allied offensives against the German front.

But the odds became heavier on Gough's front because of Haig's dispositions. For a forty-mile front, the southern part newly taken over, Gough was given only 14 divisions. The 11 divisions he put in the line were assailed by 22; and while he had only 3 in reserve, his opponents, Hutier and Marwitz, had a further 21 which they could throw in to reinforce their assault. In contrast, Byng had the same number of divisions as Gough

for a front that was little more than half as wide. And he would be attacked at the outset only on part of this front, and by only 10 German divisions (with a further 9 to reinforce them).

This discrepancy between the odds borne by Gough and Byng was increased because Haig kept his own general reserve of 8 divisions in the north. It is obvious that he took a calculated risk with Gough's front in making this doubly uneven distribution of his strength. It would be absurd to blame him for the principle, for calculated risks are inherent in wise generalship. Whether he is blameworthy in his miscalculation is a more open question. His justification for placing the weight of his resources near Arras and northward lies in the key-nature of the Arras position, in the fact that his front in the north covered the Channel ports, and in the contrary fact that there was more room behind Gough's front to fall back if necessary. Furthermore he had the good idea of launching a counterstroke southward if Gough's front was pushed in; and his reserves would have been well placed to do this if the emergency line taken up by Gough along the upper Somme had not given way prematurely.

The main criticism of Haig's dispositions is that they were weakest near the Franco-British joint. Thus he deliberately took the risk of losing touch with his allies in case of a break-through. It is obvious that his calculation did not cover such a complete and deep collapse as occurred. And there was much justification in past experience for the confidence which he, as well as Gough, showed in their power to prevent a serious break-through. Was it probable that, when the Allies had made so little visible impression on the German front in two years of repeated attack, the Germans should smash a huge hole in the British front within a few days? There is much excuse for Haig's miscalculation. But there is little excuse for the subsequent tendency of the British commanders to blame their allies for the collapse. If the French erred throughout the war in treating their ally as their servant, the British erred in making their ally their scapegoat.

In risking his junction with the French, Haig's one insurance was the arrangement he had made with Pétain for mutual support

in preference to the chance of drawing on an inter-Allied pool. Under this compact, Pétain had placed Humbert's army of six divisions in reserve south of the joint. On the evening of March 21st Pétain, on his own initiative, ordered three of these (forming the V Corps) to be ready to move. During the night he issued a fresh order for them to begin moving towards Noyon. Haig sent a message thanking him for his prompt support, but intimated that he did not wish them to intervene yet. He was still confident of stopping the German attack with his own resources.

But in the morning Haig changed his mind, and by evening the first of the French divisions had appeared on the scene, followed closely by the rest of the V Corps. And the other three divisions came up next day, the 23rd. For a strategic reinforcement of such a size, this help was remarkably prompt. In the light of the facts subsequent British complaints that Pétain was slow to fulfil his promise appear as unreasonable as they are ungenerous. It was unfortunate, however, that owing to the rapidity with which these divisions were hurried forward they had a lack of artillery and even of rifle ammunition.

There were other handicaps on the effect of their intervention. The front of the Fifth Army was caving in so fast that part of the French reinforcements had to be used to form a defensive flank along the edge of the chasm, so as to cover the rear of the main French front. And while it was intended that the other divisions should progressively relieve the southern British divisions, the further they had to march, the later they inevitably were. As a result, they were swept up in the retreat before they had time to get firmly into position. The process was not helped by the claim of the French corps commanders to assume control, of British as well as French, before they knew the situation.

But these reflections do not affect the tribute to Pétain for the promptness and fullness of his aid. It was the more creditable because he was inclined to believe that the German attack on the British front would be followed by another in Champagne, and estimated that the Germans had still 55 reserve divisions

in hand for such a blow.* Despite this, he informed Haig at a meeting on the 23rd that he was reinforcing Humbert's army by a further 6 divisions, as well as 4 of cavalry. They would form the Reserve Army Group ("G.A.R.") under Fayolle, who was to take charge "of all the French and British forces" as far north as the Somme. Next day Pétain arranged to draw a further 6 divisions from other parts of the front. By March 26th, 13 divisions and 3 cavalry divisions were on the scene, while a further 11 divisions and 3 cavalry divisions were under orders or on the way. Thus did Pétain exceed his pledge.

But the effect of it was inevitably modified by the swiftness with which the scene was changing, and the retreat extending—towards the setting sun. Pétain, disconcerted at the unchecked pace of the retreat, began to feel that he was in danger of throwing his reinforcements into a swirling torrent which might sweep them westward into the sea. He saw that the British were tending to draw northward to reknit the gap between their Fifth and Third Armies. And it was obvious, too, from Haig's original dispositions that he was more concerned to cover the Channel ports than the joint with the French. Hence Pétain took a precaution that had a far-reaching repercussion. On the evening of the 24th he issued instructions to his Army Group Commanders, in which he defined his own intention as "above all, to maintain solidly the framework of the French armies as a whole; in particular not to allow the G.A.R. to be cut off from the rest of our forces. That being assured, to maintain contact with the British forces, if possible." When the next batch of reinforcements (Debeney's army) arrived, it was either to prolong Humbert's left "in order to link it up with the British right, if that continues to hold on," or to give Humbert's army direct support. Still more significantly, the French cavalry were "to cover the left of the G.A.R. (principal mission) while seeking to keep touch with the British right (subsidiary mission)."

At eleven o'clock that night Pétain met Haig at Dury. He was

* On the morning of March 23rd the French Intelligence arrived at the curious calculation that only twenty-six out of eighty-one German reserve divisions had so far been engaged on the British front.

too frank a realist to hide his doubts or his precautions. After a statement of them he warned Haig: "If you withdraw your hand in proportion as I'm stretching out mine towards you, contact between our two armies will be broken in the end; your army then risks being cornered in open country, while I shall be reduced to covering Paris."

Aghast at Pétain's suggestion, and nettled by the implicit rebuke, Haig seems to have taken the words as a statement of Pétain's immediate intention. And if there was justification for Pétain's complaint there was also ground for Haig's suspicion. The French reinforcements showed as perceptible a tendency and primary instinct to safeguard the southern side of the chasm as Haig to preserve the northern. Haig was convinced of the importance of maintaining touch with the French, but he seems to have taken for granted that it was the responsibility of the French to take the risk of filling the breach. He had stripped his own front in the north as far as he considered safe. Disturbed to find that Pétain was so conscious of his responsibility for the French Army, Haig sought a means of overruling him. He telegraphed to London, asking Milner and Wilson to come over to France. If Haig had opposed the appointment of a supreme head, inevitably French, when there was a risk of his reserves being taken away, the situation was different when he wanted French reserves. The change in his outlook was natural.

His appeal was anticipated. Milner was already in France and Wilson preparing to follow. More than twenty-four hours before Haig's telegram was sent, Lloyd George had asked Milner to go at once to France and find out the true situation. Milner was met at Boulogne by Amery, then on the Versailles Staff. After a stop at Montreuil, where they missed Haig, they drove on through the night and reached Versailles in the early hours of the 25th, delayed because the driver had missed his way in the dark.

After a talk with Rawlinson, Milner saw Clemenceau, who agreed with him that a unified control was necessary to cope with the emergency. But when Pétain's name was mentioned, Milner made firm objection. He had already heard, from the

officers he had met, complaints of Pétain's reluctance to help ; and he knew that Wilson favoured Foch.

Foch had already taken the initiative. In the afternoon of the 24th he had asked for an interview with Clemenceau, and had handed him a note in which he gave his opinion of the military steps that ought to be taken and urged the necessity for "an organ to direct the war—one capable of giving orders and seeing that they were executed. Otherwise the risk remained, for the coalition, of entering a battle that might have the gravest consequences, inadequately equipped and inadequately directed."

According to Foch, Clemenceau's first words were : "*You* are not going to desert me, you ! I am in agreement with Haig and Pétain, what more can I do ?" "No, Prime Minister, I am not going to desert you ; but each one of us must shoulder his own responsibilities and without delay. That's why I've handed you this note."

According to the account Foch gave Recouly, Clemenceau also remarked : "The Commanders-in-Chief are in agreement. I've lunched with Haig, and I'm going to dine with Pétain." Whereupon Foch seized upon these words to retort : "Battles are not directed over the luncheon table." It was hardly a tactful remark, and in the light of it we can perhaps the better understand why Clemenceau, in his talk with Milner next day, did not specifically advocate the appointment of Foch as the supreme commander.

Before visiting Clemenceau, Foch had expounded his views on the situation to Loucheur, the Minister of Munitions. "It is serious, very serious, but it is in no sense lost. You understand, I don't want to talk of a possible withdrawal. There can be no question of a withdrawal. The time has come when we must make both armies realise this fully. Haig and Pétain have offered a magnificent resistance. The situation can be likened to a double door ; each of these generals is behind his half of the door without knowing who should push first to close the door. I quite understand their hesitation ; the one pushes who first risks having his right or left wing turned. . . . What should I do in their place ? You know my method ; I stick a wafer here,

another there, a third at the side. . . . The Germans make scarcely any further progress. A fourth wafer, and they will stop altogether." How apt a phrase-maker was Foch!

After his abortive argument with Clemenceau, Foch telephoned to Wilson in London, urging him to come over to France. They agreed that "someone must catch hold, or we shall be beaten." Foch arranged to meet Wilson, as well as Haig, at Abbeville next morning.

But at 11 a.m. on the 25th Foch had a telephone call from Clemenceau, who had just received Milner. Clemenceau curtly announced: "There's a council of war at Compiègne," Pétain's headquarters. Foch asked: "What about Abbeville?" "Send Weygand there." At the Gare du Nord, where a train was waiting, Foch met Javary, the director of railway communications, who declared: "Unless you save Amiens, all is lost." "Well, we're going to try." The train arrived at Compiègne about half-past four, as the town was being bombarded, and the conference met in a villa on the outskirts. Clemenceau had brought the President as well as Loucheur, but Milner alone represented the British, for a telephone message came to say that Haig and Wilson could not arrive in time. The meeting, thus denuded, was not barren, because it produced an impression in Milner's mind.

Pétain soberly and clearly described the situation, making no attempt to give his hearers a false assurance. He considered that Gough's army must be wiped off the balance-sheet. He himself had done all he could to close the breach with his reserves, but he did not think he would be able to throw in more than fifteen divisions. Again, it was a question whether they would be in time.

Foch leapt into the breach. He did not, like Pétain, worry the conference with calculations as to whence reserves could be drawn, and the time they would take in transport. But in impassioned words he asserted that "the danger of the great German offensive making a break between the French and British towards Amiens was formidable, that risks must be taken in other directions . . . more divisions must be thrown in, and more quickly."

At a time when spirits were low, such fiery eloquence re-kindled hopes in his hearers. Milner naturally felt that Foch would give more than Pétain. In Haig's absence, no decision could be taken, and it was arranged that the conference should meet again next morning at Dury—a rendezvous later changed to Doullens.

Foch returned to Paris, and had scarcely arrived at his flat in the Avenue de Saxe before Weygand came to see him on return from Abbeville. Haig had given Weygand a note which set forth his wishes and intentions. He asked for the immediate concentration "astride the Somme, west of Amiens, of at least twenty French divisions for the purpose of acting against the flank of the German attack on the British Army." This seemed to Foch a clear indication that Haig was going to withdraw behind Amiens. His anxiety was still more aroused by the sentence which epitomised Haig's intention "to fight falling back slowly and covering the Channel ports." It indicated that of two evils Haig would rather lose touch with the French than loose hold of the Channel ports.

Wilson himself came to see Foch about 11 p.m., after a talk with Milner. Earlier in the day Wilson had sounded Haig as to his willingness to accept Foch as co-ordinator, and felt that he had won Haig over to this solution. But during his discussion with Milner he conjured up a variant—that Clemenceau should be entrusted with supreme control of the situation, with Foch acting as his technical adviser. It was arranged that he should sound Foch on the subject. On hearing the suggestion, Foch at once interrupted: "That won't work. Clemenceau knows nothing of leading armies or directing battles. Who, then, will take charge of affairs? There will be decisions to take—who will take them? Clemenceau will say: 'I agree with Haig and Pétain.' But it is not a matter of agreeing with them. He must command. Who will assume the responsibility? . . . No, it won't work."

He then made his own proposal for Wilson to convey to Milner. "At the time of the Battle of Ypres, General Joffre gave me the task of trying to bring about a better union between

the English and French troops. If today I were placed in a similar position I should need a greater degree of authority, conferred on me by the Allied Governments themselves." It was then arranged between the two that Wilson "would suggest that Foch should be commissioned by both Governments to co-ordinate the military action of the two Commanders-in-Chief."

Wilson did not arrive back at Versailles until after midnight, when Milner had gone to bed. Thus there was no chance of a talk until at 8 a.m. the two set off together by car on the long journey to Doullens. Wilson strongly urged on Milner the wisdom of giving to Foch what would be virtually the supreme command. Milner asked what Foch thought of the idea of giving nominal control to Clemenceau with Foch as his adviser. Wilson replied that Foch disapproved of this idea. Wilson assured Milner that "Foch himself did not want to command anything," but merely wished to fill his old rôle of "First Ypres" with increased authority. This solution, urged with all Wilson's power of persuasion, appealed to Milner, and he decided to take the responsibility of committing the British Government to it. For the rest of the journey he was harassed by the one thought whether they would reach the conference in time, for although the car was travelling at breakneck speed they met many traffic blocks on their way through the edge of the battle zone.

The French representatives had set out still earlier. Loucheur, Clemenceau, and Poincaré arrived about 11 a.m., close on each other's heels, their cars racing up the street past the ancient belfry and then swinging left to draw up before the town hall. They found that Haig was inside, conferring with his army commanders, so, to pass the time of waiting and to keep warm in the frosty air, they walked up and down the square outside, while past them stolidly trudged columns of British troops. Their spirits were as chilled as their limbs. Pointing to Haig, a French general whispered to Clemenceau: "There's a man who will be obliged to capitulate in the open field within a fortnight, and we'll be very lucky if we're not obliged to do the same."

Foch arrived half an hour later. His feelings on the journey were summed up in his remark: "We are about to try to create

events, not to submit to them." Like Napoleon at Notre Dame, he was about to crown himself. As he stepped out of his car "he gave the impression of a man who was ready to throw himself bodily into the battle and to assume the heavy responsibility of the strategic direction, and that because he felt within him the soul of a great leader."

Pétain was the next arrival, sombre of mien. He complained that the British were not keeping him properly informed of the situation, and that they did not seem to take full account of the danger of being cut off from the French. In his depressingly honest way he showed the black side of the situation first, so that the members of the Government should not be nourished on false illusions. And their spirits naturally felt a pang of hunger.

Clemenceau turned to Foch and asked him what steps he would suggest. "Oh," cried Foch, "my plan is not complicated. I want to fight. I would fight without a break. I would fight in front of Amiens. I would fight in Amiens. I would fight behind Amiens. I would fight all the time, and, by force of hitting, I would finish by shaking up the Boche; he's neither cleverer nor stronger than we are. In any case, for the moment, it is as in 1914 on the Marne; we must dig in and die where we stand if need be; to withdraw a foot will be an act of treason."

Clemenceau's face lit up at these stirring sentiments, and turning to Loucheur he murmured: "That's a stout fellow." He recalled the epic story of the marshes of St. Gond—he did not know, nor ever learnt, that it was a myth.

Twelve o'clock struck. Five minutes later Milner's car swept into the square and pulled up. As he and Wilson stepped out Clemenceau came forward and, almost in the first breath, asked "if it was a fact that Marshal Haig had the intention of evacuating, and of bringing back his right wing west of, Amiens?" Milner showed his surprise and protested vigorously against such an assertion, declaring that so far as he knew it must be due to a misunderstanding. Haig now appeared and came down the steps to meet Milner. Onlookers noticed the contrast between the expressions of Haig and Wilson, Haig's face anxious and tired, on Wilson's a gleeful smile—the clue to which lay in the air of

decision which Milner wore. Milner asked Clemenceau to allow him to have a preliminary talk with Haig and his three army commanders, Plumer, Byng, and Horne. Gough, significantly, was not there. After hearing their views on the battle situation, Milner had a few words alone with Haig. He was relieved to find that, contrary to his anticipation, Haig welcomed the idea of Foch's intervention and appointment. The ice, as we know, had been broken and the ground prepared by Wilson the day before.

This preliminary discussion lasted barely a quarter of an hour, and the Franco-British conference then assembled. During the time of waiting Foch had seized the chance to revisit the little schoolhouse where he had established his headquarters in early October, 1914.

Clemenceau opened the proceedings by asking about Amiens. Haig replied that he had been misunderstood, that he had never intended to evacuate Amiens, and that he was reinforcing his right with all the divisions available. He could and would hold on north of the Somme, but south of the Somme he could do no more ; besides, he had put under General Pétain's orders all the troops of the Fifth Army that remained. At this, Pétain interjected : " Very little of it remains, and in strict truth we may say that this army no longer exists." Haig then went on to say that he might be forced to modify his line in front of Arras, although he hoped to avoid this last resource. After this statement of his own dispositions, he asked what the French were doing.

Pétain then gave his view of the situation, shading in the dark outlines first, and then suddenly unveiling a brighter prospect by the announcement that he now calculated that he would be able to throw in 24 divisions, instead of the 15 he had reckoned the day before. But he promptly damped any joy among his hearers by saying that " in such a situation one ought not to hug delusions, but to face realities and, consequently, not hide that these units would take some time to arrive on the scene, moving at the rate of two a day."

A chilly silence fell on the room, broken only by a sharp exclamation of protest from Wilson. Foch said nothing, but Milner,

sitting opposite him, read discontent and impatience on his face. And to Milner, Pétain "gave an impression of coldness and circumspection, like a man playing for safety." Clemenceau made a sign to Milner, they exchanged glances, and then withdrew into a corner of the room, as far as possible from the big table round which the delegates were seated. Clemenceau, with typical cunning, spoke first so as to manoeuvre Milner into making the first bid. "We must settle this. . . . What do you propose?" Milner, however, needed no prompting. He straightway asked if Clemenceau would agree to give Foch authority to co-ordinate the action of the two armies. Clemenceau said that he would first consult Pétain, who declared that he was ready to accept whatever was decided in the common interest. Milner meantime spoke to Haig again.

Then Clemenceau drafted the following note :

"General Foch is appointed by the British and French Governments to co-ordinate the action of the British and French Armies around Amiens. To this end, he will come to an understanding with the two Generals-in-Chief, who are requested to furnish him with all necessary information."

On seeing the draft, Haig at once objected that its terms were too narrow, and declared that Foch ought to be placed in control of the Allied armies as a whole "from the Alps to the North Sea." It is absurd to see in Haig's advocacy of an extension of Foch's authority a supreme stroke of magnanimity, as it has often been represented. Haig was a practical Scot, not given to such gestures. In accepting a superior authority, his ruling idea was to obtain an ample flow of French reserves to cope with both the immediate danger and with the further German attack that he anticipated in Flanders. Under the prevailing circumstances he had nothing to give and all to gain. The further that Foch's authority was extended the larger, naturally, would be the sources from which the reserves could be drawn. Hence Haig proposed that the words "on the whole front" should be substituted for "around Amiens." Foch had also taken prompt exception to the narrowness of the original draft, and asked that the words "on the Western Front" should be used. And this term, more exact

than Haig's, was adopted, while at Haig's suggestion the words "British and French Armies" were replaced by "Allied Armies." Presumably Haig was thinking of the American and Belgian reserves.

The final draft of the note was then read out, and signed by Milner and Clemenceau. As by magic the atmosphere changed. All faces were wreathed in smiles. The British, in anticipation, felt the infusion of new blood coursing through their veins. More French reserves. The French saw the realisation of a dream—their long-cherished project of a French Supreme Command. As they left the town hall Clemenceau delightedly declared to the head of his military secretariat, General Mordacq: "That's almost worth a victory over the Germans." And Mordacq, in retrospect, made the comment: "It certainly was, in effect, a victory—but over the English."

Haig's relief and satisfaction were equally visible to onlookers. His feelings were expressed in his remark to Milner: "I can deal with a man, but not with a committee." Foch was "radiant." His hour had come. The practical-minded Pétain wanted to discuss certain points with him. The two leant over a map, conversing in a low tone. Suddenly Foch's voice rang out: "No question of that . . . it's not possible. . . . We shall stop them. . . . Give the order. . . . We shan't retire any further." Pétain then hastened back to his battle. The British generals had already left, Haig and Foch shaking hands warmly in parting. It had turned two o'clock. Foch walked across with Weygand and the French Ministers to the *Hotel des Quatre Fils Aymon* for a late lunch. Outside British tanks stood massively on guard against any unpleasant intrusion. As they sat down Clemenceau turned to Foch and in half-complimentary, half-sarcastic accents said: "Well, you've got it at last, your high command."

Foch retorted: "It's a fine present you've made me; you give me a lost battle and tell me to win it."

"Anyhow, you've got what you wanted."

Loucheur intervened: "You shouldn't say that, Prime Minister. General Foch is accepting it out of devotion to his country, but it's no pleasure to him."

The historian may not deem these two feelings so incompatible as Loucheur implied. If Foch was inspired by love of his country, a study of his character amply indicates that such a charge was his highest pleasure.

Lunch over, Clemenceau and the President left for Paris. Milner and Wilson, who had also gone to the hotel for lunch, had already left for Montreuil, where they had tea with Haig and found him "delighted with the new arrangement," and "ten years younger tonight than he was yesterday afternoon." Wilson was even more delighted. Clemenceau had patted him on the head and called him "un bon garçon."

Foch left Doullens after lunch and drove straight to Dury, where Gough had his headquarters. His hour also had struck. Immediately after the signing of the agreement at Doullens, Wilson had raised the question of removing Gough from his command, and had offered to let Haig have Rawlinson as his successor. Haig had apparently agreed. This fact doubtless convinced Foch that Gough was culpable for the collapse, and may explain, if not excuse, the rudeness of his greeting—a greeting like the violent gust that precedes the lightning.

"What are you doing here?"

"I was waiting for you."

"You should not wait for me in that way without doing anything, or else your corps commanders will be on your heels and everyone will stampede. Go forward; the whole line will stand fast and so will your own men. I'm straightening things out. I'm going to give a few orders."

It does not seem, in retrospect, an altogether happy initial exercise of his new authority, and the implied suggestion of personal cowardice was peculiarly inappropriate when applied to a man who, whatever his limitations as an army commander, was a born thruster and first-rate cavalry commander.

When Gough asked that part of his tired troops might be relieved, Foch refused, with the remark: "One does not carry out reliefs in the middle of a battle." At Dury, Foch also saw Fayolle's Chief of Staff and gave him similar instructions, "with a view to ensuring the protection of Amiens at all costs." Foch

then drove to see Debeney, commander of the now-arriving French First Army, and told him to relieve Maxse's XVIII Corps, now the right of the British line. This relief was carried out two nights later.

Foch returned to Paris in the evening, remarking : " I've seen what there is to see, done what there is to do. I can stop them." Yet there seems to have been more doubt in his mind than he was willing to show to his subordinates, for when he reached home late that night and broke the news of his appointment to his wife, he added : " Don't congratulate me yet. I'm no prouder because of that. And pray God that it isn't too late."

Before he went to sleep he wrote a note to Pétain, saying : " The ideas that I am trying to carry out are : (1) There is not another yard of French soil to lose ; (2) the enemy must be stopped where he is ; to that end we must organise rapidly a solid defensive front and prepare in rear strong resources for manœuvre, drawing them from the whole front ; (3) it will only then be possible to think of relieving the troops now engaged ; (4) these must organise themselves to hold at all costs and fight it out where they stand."

Before this letter was written, Pétain had already taken a further practical step. On returning to his headquarters in the afternoon he had learnt from intelligence reports that 4 enemy divisions hitherto in reserve behind the Champagne front were being moved westward. Therefore he had arranged for a further 9 divisions to be drawn from his centre and right and sent to reinforce Fayolle's army group. These, as well as a few more whose dispatch was ordered next day, all arrived by April 2nd. Thus a total of 34 divisions and 6 cavalry divisions were assembled on or behind the fifty odd miles of new front north of the Oise, along which the French had stretched out to keep touch with their allies. This total left only some 60 divisions to hold the original front from the Oise to Alsace—three hundred miles long. In taking the risk, Pétain relied on the defensive strength of his trench line and on the evidence that the mass of the German reserves were concentrated on the British front. Even so it was a bold risk to assume, and the more so in comparison with what

any British commander had been willing to assume. For such boldness Foch and Pétain deserve all credit: Foch for taking the responsibility, Pétain for the calculated temerity which he showed both before Foch assumed responsibility and then in loyal compliance with Foch's desire.

On the 27th Foch went out to the battle zone again. He first visited Humbert's headquarters at Clermont, where he also saw Fayolle. He then went to Dury, where he once more treated Gough to brusque admonitions, complaining that Gough's right was not keeping touch with the French left. Foch passed on to Beauquesne, where he was pleased with Byng's attitude and disclaimer that he felt any anxiety. In the evening Foch returned south, calling at Dury to satisfy himself that Gough had fulfilled his wishes. If Foch was prepared for ill news there, it was not for the kind which greeted him. For he learnt that the Germans had pushed back the French troops and reached Montdidier, cutting one of the two railways from Amiens to Paris. After this shock Foch did not linger at Dury, but hurried on to Clermont, where he spent the night.

If Foch had been able to project his mind into the inner chambers of the German headquarters his anxiety would have been no less, but differently orientated. For the centre of gravity was on the other flank, the spot where he had left Byng, not the spot whither he had come. Although Hutier's army had reached Montdidier, its advance had momentarily come to a halt—ironically through German intervention. Hutier, indeed, had been kept on a tight rein since the start of the offensive.

For Ludendorff's real plan had been not so much to strike at the Franco-British joint south of the Somme as to crush the British north of it. Hutier's assigned rôle had merely been to guard the flank of the German offensive against French intervention while the armies of Below and Marwitz wheeled north-west towards the Channel ports, rolling up the British front. Thus the fact that the German advance had been more rapid on the south than on the north of the Somme had been a disappointment to Ludendorff. For days he had obstinately tried to redress the disproportion, bolstering up Below's attack and maintaining

Arras as the principal objective, while restraining Hutier's advance. Although Ludendorff paid lip service to the new idea of following the line of least resistance, his orders show that he could not free himself from the dead hand of Clausewitz. He was bent on breaking the British Army by breaking down its strongest sector of resistance in a virtually direct assault. And because of this obsession he neglected, until too late, to throw the weight of his reserves south of the Somme, where progress was easier and the Allies more vulnerable.

On the very day of Foch's appointment Ludendorff had ordered for the 28th a reinforced blow by Below's right against Arras. At the same time he conceded that Amiens should now be an additional main objective—for Marwitz, who was now entangled in the scarred wilderness of the old Somme battlefields. Hutier, who had an easier path, was told not to push on past the flank of Amiens without further orders. Thus the spurt that had carried him to Montdidier was virtually in disregard of Ludendorff's instructions. But his wish to press on was effectually curbed by lack of reserves.

On March 28th the Arras attack was duly launched, and, unshielded by mist or surprise, failed completely in face of Byng's well-prepared resistance. Then, at last, Ludendorff abandoned his original plan and transferred his main effort south of the Somme. But Marwitz was given nine divisions and Hutier only four. And while Marwitz received the reserves immediately at hand, Hutier had to wait, and was told to wait, for two more days before renewing his attack.

The 28th, a day of such decisive passivity by Byng's army, was also for Foch a stationary day, although vocally active. In the morning he received Pétain and Fayolle, and renewed to them his adjurations to stand fast and maintain contact with the British. In addition, on being told that Gough thought of moving his headquarters to a place further back than Dury, Foch sent him a sharp remonstrance, declaring that such a step would produce a deplorable impression.

In the afternoon Clemenceau, accompanied by Mordacq, came to Clermont and found Foch "at the top of his form and in full

cerebral activity ; in his look, in his talk, could be read his joy of at last being quit of uncertainty and, above all, impatient eagerness to act."

Their talk was barely ended when Pershing was announced. According to Mordacq he greeted Foch with the words : " France is in danger ; the situation is grave ; I've come to put myself and all my troops at your disposal."

It was an inspiring gesture on Pershing's part—although in actual fact he did no more than he had already arranged with Pétain. This was to relieve two French divisions by taking over quiet sectors. There were now (according to Pershing's final report) 300,000 American troops in France, forming eight divisions, of which three would now be in line. A month later another would relieve two French divisions near Montdidier.

This dramatic scene was thus translated officially in the communiqué : " In the course of a meeting, held yesterday at the front, General Pershing announced to General Foch : ' I come to tell you that the American people will esteem it a great honour that our troops should take part in the present battle. I ask it in my name and theirs. There is at the moment no other question than that of fighting. Infantry, artillery, aviation, all that we have is yours. Dispose of it as you wish. Other forces will soon come, as numerous as is necessary. The American people will be proud to take part in the greatest and finest battle in history.' "

It hardly needs Mordacq's hint to suggest that this account was embellished. For even if such magniloquence could be imagined on Pershing's lips, there is the fact that he was still dependent on the French for artillery six months later. More natural in sound, more probable in sentiment, was the remark which Bliss made to Foch a few days later : " We've come over here to get ourselves killed ; if you want to use us, what are you waiting for ?"

The day of the 28th did not end, however, without a concrete step. For, after hearing a gloomy report from Debeney, Foch notified Haig that " by reason of the attack on Montdidier the French cannot relieve the English south of the Somme "—as had been promised.

Next day Foch went to Abbeville for a fresh meeting with Haig, where he emphasised his desire to create two strong groups of reserves, British and French, on either flank of the enemy's bulge for a counter-offensive. The tone of the discussion was cordial, although Haig showed some dissatisfaction that Foch's appointment had not more appreciably quickened the rate at which the British troops were being relieved south of the Somme. That evening Foch established his headquarters in the town hall at Beauvais. Only two rooms were required—for this new organ of strategic control was as small in size as it was personal in nature.

In this condition there were practical drawbacks. Foch was, by his appointment, superimposed on the two Commanders-in-Chief, and by his own inclination immersed in the battle. And, while dealing direct with the French and British subordinate commanders, he lacked a headquarter organisation which might have co-ordinated his own activities with those of the other commanders—of whom there was already a plethora. In the narrow space between the Oise and the Somme there were three British and eleven French corps commanders, whose troops were considerably intermixed. One step higher came the three army commanders, one British and two French. Above them, in turn, stood a French Army group commander, and above him the two national Commanders-in-Chief. Foch was set like a crown upon the giddy pinnacle. A cynic might suggest that if the Allied resistance had been endangered originally by a lack of troops, its complaint now was an excess of commanders. For effective intervention in this congestion Foch was handicapped both by want of a staff organ and by the indefiniteness of his rôle, if also by his temperament. It was not easy for him to be more, or less, than an officially appointed Busybody-in-Chief.

He himself was not long in becoming aware of the external limitations. He felt that the weakness could be remedied by strengthening the terms of his appointment. On the 30th Clemenceau came to see him, accompanied by Winston Churchill. Foch gave a review of the situation, which, he said, was improving. "In this exposition, Foch was superb in faith and ardour." He swept off his feet even the cynical Tiger. "At seeing, in front

of our Allies, at this agonising moment, such an accumulator of energy and confidence, Monsieur Clemenceau was so overcome with pride that he threw himself into the arms of the general and clung to him in a long embrace."

Mordacq took the opportunity to urge on Churchill the need of increasing Foch's powers. Foch himself improved the opportunity by convincing Clemenceau. He took the matter up again next day and quoted several instances of the difficulties he had met in dealing with the British generals. Haig did not seem to regard "co-ordination" as a synonym for command-in-chief, and had proved tiresome when Foch wanted to regulate the way the British should be employed. On parting from Foch, Clemenceau said to Mordacq: "Foch is justified . . . we must settle this." The date was April 1st.

Clemenceau not only went to have a personal talk with Haig, but made instant arrangements for an inter-Allied conference at short notice. For this he besought the presence of the Americans as well as of Lloyd George.

While these important discussions were taking place behind the front, the battle had again flared up—only to fade almost as quickly. For when Marwitz's attack was renewed on March 30th, according to Ludendorff's new plan, it had little momentum and made little progress in face of a resistance that had been allowed time to harden. If the thin, ragged line of British troops who covered the direct path to Amiens was weary and faint from the long strain of the retreat, even fainter was the impulse to advance in the attackers, groping in unknown country and buffeted by constant air attacks, which not only shook their morale but emptied their stomach—by interrupting their supplies. Further south there seems to have been more energy in Hutier's renewed attack, which on March 31st forced the crossings of the Avre and made an ominous fresh step towards the main Amiens-Paris railway, bringing it under artillery fire. But on this sector the French were now thickly massed, if perhaps too thickly for effective action, and the German advance was brought to a halt before evening.

It was thus in an atmosphere of comparative calm that the

inter-Allied conference met at Beauvais on April 3rd. Churchill went to meet Lloyd George and Wilson at Boulogne and told them that Clemenceau's purpose was to strengthen Foch's powers. Lloyd George was favourable. Wilson, however, warned him against going so far as to make Foch Commander-in-Chief. Clemenceau, meantime, was pondering a subterfuge by which he might gain this object. On the 2nd he had received a letter from Foch which ended : " I am not complaining of anybody, but I am compelled to use persuasion instead of giving directions. A power of supreme direction seems to me indispensable for the achievement of success." Mordacq had already told Clemenceau that " the King of England " was the real stumbling-block, and suggested that the difficulty might be overcome by finding a form of words which gave Foch the power of Commander-in-Chief without the title, which " gives offence to the English." " Well," replied Clemenceau, " look for it, find it, this formula."

When he reached Beauvais on the 3rd he spent the two hours before lunch in discussing with Foch suggestions for the formula. Mordacq proposed the term " strategic direction," and to this Foch was agreeable. After lunch Clemenceau had a private talk with Lloyd George and Wilson before the conference. When the conference opened Clemenceau called on Foch to explain his difficulties. Thereupon Foch declared : " The powers conferred by the Doullens conference were limited to the co-ordination of action between the Allies. . . . Now that the opposing armies are no longer in action, but have stopped and are facing each other, there is nothing to co-ordinate. There should be authority to prepare for action and to direct it. We are back where we were, and nothing can be done until a new action begins."

Lloyd George pointed out the strength of the opposition in England to placing the British Army under the definite command of a French general. But he also said that the public wished Foch to have real power. Addressing Foch, he declared : " The English people have confidence in you. Your nomination . . . has nowhere been so well received as in my country."

Clemenceau then produced his formula : " The British and French Governments entrust to General Foch the strategic

direction of military operations on the Western Front. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British and French Armies have full exercise of the tactical direction of their armies."

Clemenceau's step in securing the presence of Pershing and Bliss was now justified, for they declared their willingness that this formula should embrace the American Army. Pershing, indeed, was delighted at the chance to affirm that it "should be included as an entity like the British and French Armies." And when Pétain realistically interposed, "There is no American Army yet as such," Pershing premonishingly retorted, "But there soon will be." His step towards independence meant the loss of British independence, for his ready acceptance of the proposals undermined British opposition—as Clemenceau had calculated.

Wilson interposed with the objection "that one never knows where strategy exactly begins and ends." To this Foch replied "that in France one knows it perfectly." If the assumption was as dubious as the possibility of exact demarcation, especially under trench warfare conditions, it sufficed as a retort. But Wilson preferred a more effective form of reply. He argued that any new draft should be based on the Doullens agreement and incorporated Clemenceau's formula in the middle of the Doullens note in such a way as to modify it.

The completed draft read :

"General Foch is appointed by the British, French, and American Governments to co-ordinate the action of the British, French, and American Armies on the Western Front. To this end, all powers necessary to secure effective fulfilment are conferred upon him. The British, French, and American Governments for this purpose entrust to General Foch the strategic direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French, and American Armies have full exercise of the tactical direction of their armies. Each Commander-in-Chief will have the right of appeal to his own Government if, in his opinion, his army is placed in danger by any order received from General Foch."

Wilson inserted the last sentence, an important qualification on Foch's power, however advisable as a national safeguard. This

was not the only shadow on Foch's satisfaction. He had specially emphasised the desirability that his sphere of control should include the Italian front also ; but Clemenceau thought it wiser to proceed by stages. Nevertheless, he put the proposal to the British Government a few days later, so as to secure their help in overcoming Italian objections ; but Wilson warned the Cabinet against it, telling them that Foch had not ingratiated himself with the Italians after Caporetto. Thus Foch's desire was once more thwarted by his old friend " Henri." Not until May 2nd did the Italian Government concede Foch a modified power of co-ordination, with the proviso that this would bear no right of command unless other Allied armies were sent to Italy. And the Belgians held out against accepting his directions until the final autumn offensive took place.

Wilson's revised draft was accepted by all the parties at the Beauvais conference, and the meeting broke up amicably. As they left the room Lloyd George gaily said to Foch: " And now which must I bet on, Ludendorff or Foch ?"

" You can back me, and you will win. For Ludendorff has got to break through our lines and this he can no longer do. As for us, our present business is to stop him, which we will certainly accomplish. Later on—when our turn comes to break through his lines—that is another matter. Then it will be seen what we can do."

If the bet was ultimately to be justified, the assurance of Ludendorff's incapacity was misplaced. The very day after the conference there was an ominous foretaste.

On April 1st Foch had told Clemenceau : " The enemy's initiative seems now blocked and paralysed." On April 4th a new German assault with fifteen divisions was hurled against the Allied line between the Somme and Montdidier. But only four divisions were fresh, and although the attack made a fresh dent in the Allied line it did not threaten a break-through. The worst effect was that on the French sector it brought the German artillery within closer range of the Amiens-Paris railway.

Here the battle ended and the first German offensive was finally brought to a halt. In achieving that result Foch played a

characteristic part. To many who met him his unconquerable spirit was a tonic—if to a few it was an emetic. Behind the front especially his injections brought fresh confidence to commanders who might otherwise have countenanced withdrawal, harmless and even beneficial in themselves, but cumulatively dangerous. Still more marked was the effect on political and public opinion.

In the actual conduct of the battle it is more difficult to put one's finger on any points where Foch had a definite effect, either in accelerating the arrival of reinforcements or in parrying the enemy thrusts. It was Ludendorff who really placed the decisive check on the German progress, and foiled his own aim.

Foch's instructions were drawn up in the bold, broad outline now familiar, comprehensive yet unsubstantial. They were exhortations rather than specific directions. And the executants found difficulty in pinning him down to any point of guidance. This indefiniteness had its advantages. As at Ypres in 1914, it perhaps led commanders to hold on a little longer when otherwise they might have gone back. But they might reply, with some reason, that Foch had to thank Ludendorff for making this vindication of vagueness possible. It is at least clear that without Ludendorff's deliberate check on Hutier's advance the Allied front must have been driven in further—at the dangerous point of juncture. And in that event a local break would have been likely to spread into general disaster, for want of guidance as to what course should then be taken.

But Foch, as always, was guided by faith. "Le bon Dieu" would absolve him from the need to answer awkward questions. The answer that he gave to a "doubting Thomas" during the crisis summed up not only his view but his direction of the battle: "Materially, I do not see that victory is possible. Morally, I am certain that we shall gain it." Yet the battle to him was as much a physical experience as for any medieval monk beset by the devil. There is an underlying significance in the impression recorded by one who saw him in his two-roomed headquarters at Beauvais: "The most insignificant German colonel would have made ten times as much show. Foch is still the same, in his grey-blue uniform, with his cavalryman's walk, his short legs,

his large head wrinkled and bronzed by the war, the searching glance, sometimes malicious beneath the puckered eyelids, the heavy moustache greyish and tobacco-stained, and the mouth which can take so many diverse expressions in a few minutes, from the most brutal vigour to an ironical good humour. His gestures are still prodigiously prompt, prodigiously expressive. He showed me the map where, in diverse colours, was written the story of a battle nearing its end. He explained its phases. And then : ' There ! That's past. What had we got to do ? To stop them at all costs.' He threw out his arms and drew them back gradually ; the pocket seemed to grow beneath my eyes. ' And then to stand firm. That's now !' His two hands plunged towards the ground in a gesture that would have arrested the universe. ' And finally—this'll come later—that !' His arms thrown open anew, he brought his fists forward to crash round the venturesome foe."

If the modern conditions of command held Foch far back behind the fighting-line, his spirit was projected into the fighting-line through a bodily medium. He fought the enemy in person, and fought them with his fists, even though he did but hit the air. Yet it would seem that he was unconscious of his own action and attributes. For when shown an old photograph in which he had been caught in a characteristic attitude, he replied, with a wave of the arm that almost knocked over the man beside him : " It's not me ! I never make gestures !"

Chapter XVII

THE TRIALS OF FAITH

LUDENDORFF'S failure to secure a decisive result from his first and greatest offensive was the more significant by comparison with his cost account. Although eighty thousand British soldiers were newly caged in German prison camps, their capture had proved expensive. For the first time since 1914 the Germans had suffered heavier loss than their opponents. All the skill shown in the methods of the offensive had not succeeded in making the offensive profitable.

But neither Ludendorff nor his chief opponent indulged in such reflections.

On April 3rd, immediately after the Beauvais agreement, Foch issued his first *directive*. It opened with the statement :

“ The enemy is now held up from Arras to the Oise. On this front he can resume the offensive (*a*) with ease north of the Somme, and particularly in the region of Arras, thanks to the numerous railways at his disposal ; (*b*) with greater difficulty on the south, where the railways he has captured are less numerous, are in bad order, and lie partly within range of our guns.”

As a forecast this appreciation proved incorrect. For the Germans never again attempted to take the offensive north of the Somme ; but the very next day they made another big attack south of the Somme. Like Foch's pre-war forecast of the original German plan, his appreciation illustrated his tendency to base his judgment on strategic factors and overlook the question whether a course was practicable from a tactical point of view. The Germans, in contrast, had learnt by hard experience the strength of the Arras position.

Foch then passed on to his intentions—"to maintain ourselves defensively, for the moment, on the front Albert-Arras." A French reserve would be kept north of Beauvais which would be able to counter any "very powerful enemy offensive north of the Somme." But Foch, true to his nature, was contemplating a counter-offensive. No sooner was the enemy offensive dying down than Foch's first thought was to take the offensive himself. Hence he ordered :

"(1) As soon as possible a double French offensive in the Montdidier region with the object of clearing the St. Just-Amiens railway, while also profiting by the right-angled shape of our front to drive the enemy eastwards from the Avre, and also to push northward towards Roye ; (2) a British offensive eastward astride the Somme, between the Luce and the Ancre, with the object of disengaging Amiens." "It would be of the greatest advantage if these two offensives, whose directions fortunately harmonise, could be carried out simultaneously. The Commanders-in-Chief are therefore requested to be good enough to notify the date on which they judge it possible to undertake these operations ; it is important that they start with the least possible delay."

A week later this offensive "castle in the air" collapsed with dramatic suddenness. Ludendorff had still several thunderbolts in reserve, and he forestalled Foch by launching the next in an entirely new sector. On April 9th the Germans broke through the front in Flanders. Next day Haig informed Foch that he must no longer count on Rawlinson's army for the attack on the Somme.

Pétain also, with less apparent justification, seized the opportunity to excuse himself from obeying Foch's instructions. The reason he gave was that, without Rawlinson's army, Fayolle would not have sufficient forces to ensure success. As the French had now assembled over forty divisions north of the Oise the excuse was palpably insufficient. And it is curious that Foch accepted it. Pétain's real reason would seem that he endorsed the opinion of Fayolle that "since March 21st the war has taken a new form . . . for which our soldiers are not yet sufficiently trained." Fayolle, indeed, told Clemenceau "it will be wise to

train our soldiers in these new methods of fighting and also to wait until we are reinforced by the Americans." The last sentence especially gave the key to Pétain's mind. By passive resistance he would evade Foch's pressure for offensives until, with the turn of the summer, the tide of the war was turned by the arrival of America's first million men. One cannot but admire the calm pertinacity with which Pétain abstained from premature action until his calculation was fulfilled and his 1917-bottled plan matured.

In the few days between the Beauvais conference and the new thunderbolt in Flanders Foch had not been inactive. On April 5th he received the French war correspondents, saying: "Well, gentlemen, our affairs are not going badly. The Boche, as we must call him by this name, has been held up since March 27th. Look at the map—the wave is dying on the beach. We have stopped him. Now we must try to go one better. I don't think I have any more to say to you; go on with your task—work with your pens and we'll work with our arms."

On the 6th Foch had a letter from Haig which declared that a German offensive was imminent between Arras and Bethune. This anticipation, correct as to the enemy's intention, misjudged the area of the attack. For the suggested sector did not even overlap the actual sector; Bethune, the northern limit suggested, would prove the southern limit of the actual attack. As a reply to the menace Haig asked that the French, "without delay," should relieve the four British divisions south of the Somme, or place four of their own divisions in reserve behind Arras.

On the 7th Foch met Haig at Abbeville and learnt that Haig now expected that the enemy offensive would extend as far south as Albert. This coincided with Foch's own anticipation, and, in partial fulfilment of Haig's desire, he ordered Pétain to place four divisions west of Amiens, "ready to intervene rapidly either in the region of Arras or in the region of Amiens."

That afternoon Foch moved his own headquarters from overcrowded Beauvais, too inviting a target for enemy aircraft, to the tiny village of Sarcus, on the northward road to the seaside resort of Le Tréport. At Sarcus he installed his offices in a small

house, taking one of the ground-floor rooms for himself and the other for Weygand, while he took as his abode a lilliputian modern "castle" that had been built on the site of an old-time château. Here he stayed in restful quietude and solitude until the early days of June.

On April 9th he drove north to call on Haig at Montreuil, arriving just after midday. He found Wilson already closeted with Haig, who had received news that the Germans were attacking north of Bethune. Although the full extent of the danger was as yet not realised, Haig pressed for support, preferably by the French taking over a six-division front at Ypres. According to Wilson, "Foch would not hear of relieving us either up at Ypres or opposite Amiens. He simply would not hear of it." Foch assured Haig again that Maistre's Tenth Army of four divisions and a cavalry corps was being moved up behind Amiens, but told Haig that he must depend on his own resources for the moment. Foch was still convinced that the attack was a preliminary to an attack between Arras and the Somme.

He then took up with Wilson a different question which had been much on his mind during the preceding days. "Foch wants a title for himself." On the 6th Foch had told Clemenceau that the Beauvais agreement "was insufficient." He was "in effect very embarrassed about putting a title at the head of his official letters." He felt also that the "title of Commander-in-Chief, which he lacked," was necessary to convince the British that his requests were commands. Clemenceau had promised to take up the question with the Allied Governments, but Foch was impatient, and gave Clemenceau a vigorous reminder two days later. He also, as we have seen, seized the chance to impress Wilson with the need of such a title. Clemenceau kept his word. On the morning of April 14th—when the British in Flanders were on the verge of disaster—Mordacq found Clemenceau "beaming." "He had just received a telegram from Monsieur Lloyd George telling him that the British Government saw no objection to General Foch assuming the title of Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in France." Mordacq was about "to dash off" and announce the glad tidings to Foch, when

Clemenceau stopped him and said that "in order to spare American susceptibilities" he must first obtain the approval of Bliss. This was at once accorded, however, and in the evening the announcement of Foch's new title was broadcast from the Eiffel Tower. Mordacq declared "the German guns had been stronger than British pride, and had compelled it to give way." Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the British were too occupied with the German menace to worry about trifles.

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Once again in a thick mist the German attack had been launched in the early morning of April 9th with nine divisions on an eleven-mile front between Bethune and Armentières. This was held by only three divisions, two British and one Portuguese. The Portuguese in the centre were soon swept away, and by midday the Germans had made a hole three miles deep.

The British First Army commander, Horne, had rebuffed the warnings given by some of his subordinates that an attack was impending on this sector. He had also been warned that the Portuguese corps was in a bad state of morale. He decided to relieve it. But with amazing rashness he withdrew most of one division on the 5th and left the other to hold the whole corps front until its intended relief on the night of the 9th. Then the Germans relieved it prematurely. And the Portuguese were in such a hurry that they commandeered British staff cars far in rear. Some of them also, streaming back in panic flight, got in the line of fire of their allies' machine-guns, with unfortunate results to themselves.

The Portuguese collapse led to the crumbling of the British sector north of the breach, but fortunately the southern flank held firm. Next day, however, the German attack was extended northwards to the Ypres-Comines Canal, and Armentières was pinched out. That night the breach was thirty miles in width. By the 12th it had reached a depth of ten miles. Such a depth was more dangerous here than forty miles further south. For in Flanders the British Armies, their communications, and their ports, were enclosed in a narrow "throat" of land sensitive to

the least pressure and all too easy to strangle. The Germans had approached dangerously close to the rail centre of Hazebrouck. Once there they would have their fingers on the jugular vein.

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On the morning of April 10th Foch received Haig's message that the British would be unable to take part in the projected offensive astride the Somme. In reply he impressed on Haig that "it is as essential to maintain completely the existing front in Flanders as that in the region of Arras." The admonition must have seemed somewhat unreal to the recipient, who already knew that the Germans had breached thirty miles of his front in Flanders. Even Mordacq confesses that he was surprised by Foch's optimism. In the evening Foch received a letter from Haig with the urgent request that the French should take "immediate dispositions to relieve a portion of the British front and take an active part in the battle." Foch at once set off for Montreuil, where he met both Haig and Wilson, and argued that even if he arranged to relieve some of the British troops on the Somme they would not be set free in time to deal with the emergency. And he sought to persuade Haig, who still feared a stroke against Arras, that it was better that the French reserves should be ready to intervene there. As a further concession, he would order Pétain to send a division to Dunkirk as quickly as possible.

This was cold comfort to Haig, who had already scraped his own front for reserves to "putty up" the breach. He had the more reason for anxiety because even the original promise to place four divisions in reserve behind Amiens had not been fulfilled. Although Foch had ordered this step on the 7th, he found on the 10th that it had not begun. In consequence, those divisions did not even reach Doullens until the 13th.

On the 12th, when the Germans had made a fresh bound forward to within five miles of Hazebrouck, Haig issued his now historic message to the troops: "Every position must be held to the last man. . . . With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end." It seemed to convey a warning to the British troops that

hope had gone and only honour remained—to go down fighting with their faces to the foe.

Happily for them the most depressed man was not in their thin ranks but behind the opposing ranks. Ludendorff himself had again come to the rescue of the British. He had begun the attack half-heartedly and he nourished it spasmodically. Major Wetzell, his strategical adviser, had originally urged that the Arras–St. Quentin offensive, christened by the code-name “Michael,” should be followed by a second great stroke called “St. George” towards Hazebrouck a fortnight later, as soon as the British reserves had been drawn south. But Ludendorff pressed “Michael” so far and so long that when he turned belatedly to attempt “St. George” he was temporarily short of reserves and munitions. Hence it was launched with only one-third of the intended weight, and, with a sense of ironic humour, rechristened “Georgette.” Its dramatic success, which had surprised Ludendorff, led him to dole out more reserves, but never in time or in the quantity for real success. The Germans’ initial impetus began to wane on the 13th, and on that day also the British and Australian reserves brought by Haig from the Somme arrived in time to bar the path to Hazebrouck; Plumer, commanding the Second Army, now took over charge of all except the southern fringe of the battle area.

But Ludendorff’s attitude was not known to the British. They only felt the effect of his blows, not his doubts. And Haig felt increasing dissatisfaction with the fruits of the unified command. What was the use of paying the price for French reserves if they were not delivered?

Foch had not been idle, but he was intent, even to the point of hazard, on husbanding French reserves for his offensive schemes. On the 12th he gave orders for a cavalry corps to be sent to St. Omer, and also gave his idea of how the battle should be conducted. The two flanks of the breach should be secured “on the south by progressive occupation of the general line Bethune–St. Omer, facing north-east; on the north, by the progressive occupation of the general line of Mont Kemmel–Cassel, facing south.” These lines might have been drawn on the map

with a ruler, for they represented two strokes thus :
 "Between these two flanks, solidly held," the enemy's advance was "to be slowed down, then stopped," by occupying "successive points of resistance facing east." The British staff seem to have felt that this solution of their problem was too purely geometrical, and that an arithmetical reinforcement of their forces would have been more helpful.

On the 14th there was an acrimonious meeting at Abbeville between Haig and Foch. So grave was the crisis that Milner had come over and was present. Haig laid stress on the exhausted state and thinned ranks of the British Army. He again pressed Foch to give it relief by taking over part of the British front.

Foch made a point-blank refusal "to carry out a relief while the battle was in progress ; this operation would immobilise both the relieving troops and those being relieved during the time required for the operation, and this at the very moment when the size of the Allied reserves is scarcely sufficient." Haig then asked that at least Maistre's small Tenth Army should be moved up from Doullens as far as Bethune, and that the Fifth Army, also of four divisions, should in turn make a step northward. Foch refused. For he was still convinced that the Flanders attack was no more than a strong feint to cover a fresh blow further south.

His only concession, apart from moving one division a mere ten miles north of Doullens, was to ask the Belgians to extend their front slightly south towards Ypres. They had previously refused his request that they would place some of their reserves at Plumer's disposal, but they were now willing to take over an extra piece of the front, and on the 18th they relieved a British division north of Ypres.

During the interview on the 14th Foch's constant exclamation "Bon !" got on Haig's nerves until at last he retorted, "Ce n'est pas bon du tout !" And, thoroughly dissatisfied with the results, he formally declared next day that "the arrangements made by the generalissimo were insufficient to meet the military situation." It was a threat to the Beauvais agreement and a challenge to the new Supreme Command that could not be ignored.

On the 16th Foch came to the conclusion that the danger in

Flanders was more serious than he had recognised, and that "French reserves must be hurried to Flanders." He told Pétain to "prepare" to move a further division direct to Flanders, and also ordered one of Maistre's divisions to be ready to move up by motor convoy. To Foch's annoyance, Plumer had completed overnight a withdrawal from the nose of the Ypres salient. At the sacrifice of the few square miles of mud that had been purchased so dearly in 1917, this withdrawal not only provided Plumer with fresh reserves by the shortening of his line, but frustrated an attack which the Germans were just preparing—to pinch off the salient. Once more in the history of the war a calculated withdrawal achieved far more, at no cost, than many expensive counter-attacks.

On the 16th Foch had driven north "in order to examine for myself the situation in Flanders." On his way he met Milner and Wilson as well as Haig and his Chief of Staff, Lawrence, at Abbeville. According to Wilson's diary, Foch "considered Plumer had sufficient troops now that he had been reinforced by two French infantry divisions and three French cavalry divisions, that our tactical handling was not good, and that he was going up to see and inquire *sur place*. Lawrence, who had just come down from Plumer, said that Plumer was doing all that was possible, but that he had not sufficient troops, that the British troops were exhausted, and that without real assistance he would have to give up ground again. Foch brushed this aside. Haig raised the question of inundations, and showed by map and the engineers' calculations that most of the serious inundations were salt water and would take twenty-five to thirty days, and he urged as he had already done . . . that these should be started at once. Foch said that he had on the 12th given orders for a 'barrage' inundation of fresh water to be commenced. This seems to be quite insufficient. I put to Foch in the plainest terms that he must inundate to full at once, and send up much more reinforcements. Nothing was settled, and he went off to Blondécques."*

Next morning there was a fresh meeting there between Foch and Wilson, who, in agreement with the opinion of Plumer and

* Plumer's headquarters.

Haig, proposed that the Allied armies in Flanders should be drawn right back by stages to the line of the inundations from Aire through St. Omer to the coast. This would cover Calais, but meant the giving up of Dunkirk, as well as the remaining strip of Belgium. Foch vigorously rejected such an idea. "I refused to adopt such a measure, and I could not share Sir Douglas's fears in regard to the port of Dunkirk."

Wilson's diary gives a fuller account of the discussion. "Plumer had a long talk with me before Foch came in. Plumer is quite clear that, if the Boches attack heavily, he cannot hold the line of the hills much longer." "Then Foch came in and we talked, and Foch gave Plumer his instructions, which consisted of holding his present ground and tidying up. As I pointed out to him, all this is quite simple, provided one has the necessary troops, and quite impossible if one has not. Then Plumer went off to Cassel, and Foch and I had a long talk alone. I told Foch that there were two courses open to him—to accept battle or to retire with [our] left on the inundations. He was entirely in favour of accepting battle on our present ground, his reason being that we shall save Dunkirk, and that we are fighting on the strongest battle line we possess in the north. I told him that, if he did accept battle, then he must act accordingly and bring up troops."

That day the Germans made a bid to capture Kemmel Hill, but were repulsed. Next day, the 18th, they made a vain attempt to break down the southern buttress near Givenchy of the great bulge in the British front. After this failure there was a week's lull in the storm.

Coincidentally with the pause in the German offensive, Foch brought up by rail and motor three more French divisions, making five in all. He would not spare more because he now anticipated a new German offensive, "probably between the Somme and Montdidier." Further, he himself was again giving orders for a French offensive south of the Somme. It was typical, also, that he should instruct the troops sent to Flanders to help the British by making a series of short-range attacks; but these, as at Ypres in 1915, did not materialise. He then, under fresh

pressure from Haig, modified his attitude and allowed these French reinforcements to give direct relief to the British by taking over the Kemmel sector.

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On April 24th the new German offensive south of the Somme was delivered. The expectation was thus fulfilled. But it was truly a mountain long in labour that brought forth a mouse. Parts of six divisions attacked on a mere three-mile front between Villers-Bretonneux and the Luce. Cloaked by an early morning mist, they broke into and past Villers-Bretonneux, thus bringing them on to the edge of the plateau, from which they could see the towers of Amiens Cathedral on the elusive horizon. Thus the nibble, if small, was threatening. When the news reached Foch he ordered a counter-attack. Rawlinson had already switched two Australian brigades to the spot for such a purpose, and they recaptured Villers-Bretonneux under cover of darkness.

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Next day, the 25th, the Germans resumed their offensive in Flanders, but only on a limited front. The historic Kemmel Hill was captured from the French with surprising ease, and the British to the north were in turn forced to fall back. For a few hours a last opportunity of breaking through was vouchsafed to the Germans. But Ludendorff apprehensively intervened to check them from exploiting it. Yet on the eve of this stroke the only British reserves remaining under Haig's hand were two divisions in process of being reorganised and one just arriving from Italy.

On hearing news of the fresh attack Foch's first thought was that Haig might now take the opportunity to withdraw his line to the west of Ypres. He wrote off at once to say that such a step "ought not to be foreseen," and added that he was ready to come north himself if Haig "did not think he could carry out these instructions." It illustrates Foch's conviction of the power of his presence to turn the scales. On the other hand, he also ordered one more division and some heavy artillery to be sent north.

Next morning, the 27th, he was annoyed to hear that Plumer had quietly carried out a further withdrawal in the Ypres salient, bringing back his main line of resistance to the canal. Although this step straightened and strengthened Plumer's line at its dangerous corner, the idea of surrendering voluntarily any patch of soil—or mud—was still abhorrent to Foch.

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There was a fresh conference at Abbeville that morning, Clemenceau coming from Paris while Milner and Wilson came over from England. They had spent the night at Montreuil, there discussing with Haig the momentous question, already debated in the Cabinet, whether they should, "in case of further serious retirement, give up Calais and Boulogne, or give up the French and cover the Channel ports"—as Haig originally considered the less of two evils. At Montreuil Wilson learnt that Foch had not yet started the salt-water inundations, urged on him ten days earlier. This omission increased the necessity of predetermining the course to be taken "as a last resort." Haig now agreed that it should be to fall back south.

The inter-Allied conference began with a breeze. Wilson "referred to the astonishing proposal of the Tiger to send over two colonels tomorrow to examine our man-power." The atmosphere improved when Foch promised to take over the front of the much worn British corps that was holding Villers-Bretonneux. Wilson noted incidentally that "the loss of Kemmel is a sore subject." It was human nature that the British should find some consolation in the French lapse there, for their own disasters had given rise to an increasingly disdainful attitude among the French staff. Not until a month later would this be suddenly dissipated by a turn of misfortune's wheel.

The next subject of discussion was Foch's proposal for a *roulement* to Alsace, the idea being that reliefs of worn-out British divisions should be compensated by sending them to take over quiet sectors of the French front. The British saw no advantage in this, and suspected that the intermixture was designed to increase French control over their troops. Wilson "pointed out

that our 60 divisions had had 300,000 loss, and their 100 divisions had had 60,000-70,000 losses." If they "started a *roulement*, the British Army would disappear." His proposal was that the French should "take some of the punishment." Foch countered with a double-edged argument. It was against his principles to carry out the relief of troops who were engaged in a battle, and there was no use in relieving the troops holding sectors where there was no fighting. Haig did not appreciate this ingenious sophistry, and energetically insisted that the French should at least relieve the two British corps holding the line from Kemmel to Ypres that were now sandwiched between the French and Belgians. Foch promised to think this over.

The conference then broke up, and Wilson seized the chance to confront Foch with the question: "Supposing we are again driven back, which base will you cover? Are you going to protect Paris and France before everything else and thereby abandon the defence of the Channel ports, the bases of the British Army? Or will you, in order to cover the Channel ports, risk the protection of Paris?" Foch answered: "I do not intend to abandon or uncover in any way either the road to Paris or the road to the ports. The first is indispensable to the French Army, the second to the British Army and also to the safety of the Belgian Army." "That's all very well, but if you have to let one or the other go?" "I shall let nothing go." "But if you really have to?" "I shall hold on and defend both: nothing shall be let go. There is nothing to let go."

And in retrospect he added triumphantly: "I did not let anything go." But once more, perhaps even more than before Amiens, it was Ludendorff who made possible the preservation of this indefiniteness. At the time it produced more exasperation than assurance among some of his hearers.

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After the conference Foch motored north, to discover for himself whether the British had been exaggerating the extremity of their need. This time he seems to have realised that their statement was sober truth. "I was now struck with the enormous

Furthermore, if his prediction had proved right, as at Ypres in 1914 and 1915 the British troops had suffered an excessive strain in proving it. If British complaints of French reluctance to help them in stopping the first German offensive are seen, when historically analysed, to have been fundamentally unjust, there was just cause for complaint as to the second offensive. This was a paradoxical reflection on the birth of a unified command. If there were inconveniences, ultimately accepted, in sending French reserves north to Flanders, there was less reason in Foch's reluctance to release British reserves by taking over more of the British front near the Somme.

In fairness to him it should be recognised that his delay in helping the British was due, not to unwillingness, but rather to a misjudgment of the situation. He was convinced that the attack in Flanders was only a diversion, and he was consumed by a desire to begin the counter-offensive—before the time was ripe. While his consequent care to husband his reserves can be understood, it is rationally inexplicable, save in terms of his theory of war, that he should have opposed every calculated withdrawal which might ease the strain. By his opposition he tended to increase the strain and the wastage, and so caused more demand upon his balance of reserves.

A still greater contradiction had marked his general view of the situation. For his prolonged underestimate of the danger in Flanders was due to his conviction that the enemy's proper course was to continue their attack in the south. And that conviction, although nourished by his theory of strategy, nullified his own lecture-warnings against preconceived ideas of the enemy's course. His own misconception, in fact, was due to a preconception. Some time later, when dining with the British officers attached to him, he argued at length that the Germans ought to have persevered with their offensive towards Amiens and Abbeville, which offered them a prospect of severing the north to south communications and of separating the opposing armies. "Oh ho! Oh ho! They renewed their attacks, but in the north, where they expected to gain an easy success." He was inclined to ascribe the enemy's apparent division of aim to the divided

interests of the two Army Group Commanders. "Where we made a single command, they made two, that of the Crown Prince and that of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria." Foch concluded: "I wonder whether Ludendorff knows his business; I do not believe that he does."

If Foch was justified in doubting Ludendorff's ability to ensure that tactical gains contributed to a strategic goal, he did not show due recognition of Ludendorff's realisation that what is tactically possible must take precedence of what is strategically ideal. Foch's misunderstanding of Ludendorff's first principle had been the source of his own misjudgment of the menace to the British in Flanders.

His misjudgment was not, however, the whole cause of the delay in sending French relief. For Pétain was a strong check on him, tending to resist and reduce any despatch of French reserves to the north. Pétain's attitude during the second offensive was a contrast to that when the first began. It is curious that he should have been unfairly criticised by the British in the one case and have escaped criticism in the other. The explanation of the contrast is that they now held Foch responsible. And the explanation of Pétain's attitude would seem to be that he now felt free from responsibility—save for his own army. Where, previous to the appointment of an Allied Commander-in-Chief, Pétain had taken risks to help his co-partner, he now, like Haig earlier, felt that the security of his own army must be his prime concern. This was natural, if ironical.

INTERLUDE

Four weeks were to pass before Ludendorff struck again. Foch's first thought, when the Flanders offensive died away, was of his own counter-offensive to disengage the Amiens-Montdidier line. Fayolle was directed to work out plans for such an operation.

Foch's immediate concern, however, was to build up resources for taking the offensive. Sparing as he had been with reserves, far too many, he felt, had been absorbed. Hence his aim was to

create new reserves. With the badly mauled British Army, this was difficult. Although fresh drafts to the number of 140,000 had been hurried out from England, and divisions brought back from other theatres, three months would elapse before it would regain its striking power. Foch was unwilling to admit or allow this, and he set himself to correct it. His efforts caused fresh friction, and during May relations were often badly strained, all the more because British resentment at the tardy aid given in Flanders rubbed against the harsh comment of the French Press and public in regard to the British defeats.

As a sequel to the drain of meeting the first German offensive, Haig broke up five of his divisions to fill the gaps in others. After the second German offensive he broke up a further four. On May 11th Foch protested vigorously against this decision. He suggested, as a means to avoid it, that British battalions should be reduced from 930 to 800 men. While his constant cry was for "men," he preferred to retain the original number of divisions rather than to make a smaller number up to full strength. This was certainly a wise policy from the point of view of strategic action, and for tactical action a high proportion of artillery and machine-guns was more important than quantity of riflemen. In his emphasis on "concentration of artillery fire, relatively few infantry," Foch showed an increasing appreciation of modern conditions.

The proposal did not find favour, however, with the British. Haig refused to reduce the battalion strength. But he maintained the cadre, or frame, of the divisions in question and promised to build them up anew if, and as soon as, drafts made it possible to do so. To this end, men of a low physical category, classed as only fit for home service, were sent out as an emergency measure. Haig also, if reluctantly, met Foch's wishes by agreeing to try the *roulement* system, and in return for the French divisions kept in Flanders, five battle-worn British divisions were sent to the French front, where they were given the task of holding the supposedly quiet sector at the eastern end of the Chemin-des-Dames. It was to prove an unhappy miscalculation, and for a third time they would be plunged into the cauldron of battle.

It is significant that Haig here agreed to Foch's insistence against the wishes of Wilson, who was calculating, and miscalculating, that the British forces in France would have to be reduced by twenty-five divisions in August. It is significant also that Wilson, the most fervent of "Frenchmen," was now reacting in alarm from the result of his own untiring efforts to establish French hegemony. On May 12th he noted in his diary: "The French mean to take us over body and soul. They are proposing to pool oats, and to have a Frenchman to say how many horses each country is to have, and how much ration, etc. A paper this morning from Du Cane says that Foch and Weygand are saying that our battalion estimate is too big and ought to be lowered, etc. Numberless signs of increasing interference." To curtail an Englishman's, still more an Irishman's, free use of horses was naturally the most poignant blow to his self-respect.

Meantime Foch's greater concern was to create new reserves by utilising American resources. For months there had been a continual struggle, open and underground, between the French and British desire to fill their thin ranks with American infantry and Pershing's determination to subordinate all needs to that of creating an all-American Army. If the issue had so far been indeterminate, it was largely because of the slow rate of American arrivals. The March emergency had promised an acceleration. On March 27th the Supreme War Council had passed a resolution, approved by Bliss, that during the emergency "only American infantry and machine-gun units" should be despatched to France instead of waiting for complete divisions, and that these units would be incorporated temporarily in Allied divisions. President Wilson promised that 120,000 men a month should be despatched, and for their transport British shipping was to be allocated—at the cost of curtailing the food supplies of Great Britain. And by these means the rate of American reinforcements was to rise from 60,000 in the month of March to 280,000 in June.

But Pershing interpreted the agreement differently from the Allies, and sought to evade the generous desire of his own Government to relieve the crisis. He took his stand upon the pre-emergency arrangement that the infantry of six divisions

should be sent in British shipping for brigading with the British forces, and argued that the tonnage in excess of that necessary for these 120,000 men should be used as he wished—for the artillery, engineers, and supply services, with which he could build up complete divisions. President Wilson, although sympathetic to the Allied pleas, was averse to interference with Pershing's freedom of decision.

In vain efforts to overcome Pershing's opposition by persuasion, Foch covered the whole gamut of the vocal keyboard. At a personal discussion with Pershing he declared: "If we do not take steps to prevent the disaster which is threatened at present the American Army may arrive in France to find the British pushed into the sea and the French driven back over the Loire, while it tries in vain to organise on lost battlefields over the graves of Allied soldiers." When this appeal failed, a meeting of the Supreme War Council was arranged, and took place at Abbeville on May 1st and 2nd. Here, following upon the arguments of Clemenceau and Lloyd George, Foch at first took the line of assuming that Pershing "in his generosity and his breadth of view, will grant the fairness" of extending to the French Army for June the concession made to the British for May. But Pershing, "noting Foch's special plea for France," took the opportunity to suggest that it was merely a new version of the old scheme of dividing up the American troops.

Next, Foch tried the high note: "I am Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in France, and my appointment has been sanctioned not only by the British and French Governments, but also by the President of the United States. Hence I believe it my duty to insist on my point of view." But Pershing was immune against intimidation: "We all knew that no authority to dictate regarding such matters had been conferred upon General Foch."

Faced with this deadlock, Clemenceau suggested that the conference should adjourn while Foch, Pershing, and Milner re-examined the question. Foch began the private discussion by declaring that the war would be lost unless his programme was carried out. Pershing replied that even if untrained contingents

were brought over to fight under French and British command, they would not be ready until August, when the Allies themselves would have fresh drafts trained to fill their ranks. Foch asked : " You are willing to risk our being driven back to the Loire ? " Pershing answered : " Yes, I am willing to take the risk. Moreover the time may come when the American Army will have to stand the brunt of this war, and it is not wise to fritter away our resources in this manner." The morale of the Allied armies was " low," that of his men was " very high," and he did not wish them to be contaminated.

The three Prime Ministers, too impatient to wait longer, came into the room at this moment. Milner met them and, in a stage whisper, said to Lloyd George : " You can't budge him an inch." They tried afresh, however, until Pershing banged the table with his fist, and vehemently declared : " Gentlemen, I have thought this programme over very deliberately and will not be coerced."

The discussion was then adjourned till next day, when, after more wrangling, Lloyd George's promise to " scrape together " extra shipping paved the way to a compromise most favourable to Pershing—and in consequence most aggravating to Clemenceau. Preference was to be given to infantry and machine-gunners only in so far as they could be transported in British ships. By an increased effort the British would provide tonnage for at least 130,000 men in May and 150,000 in June, leaving Pershing free to use American shipping for the transport of artillery, etc., as he desired. Moreover, he would only concede that the preference given to infantry and machine-gunners should prevail during May and June, while he reserved the right to dispose as he wished of those sent in June, and to recall from the British front the six divisions brought over in May whenever he judged that the emergency was past. From his point of view he had achieved a bargain wholly advantageous to his plan of building an all-American Army. If he had still to show whether he was a great commander, he had proved himself a masterly man of business.

Although in parting from Pershing Foch remarked, "*Mon Général, nous sommes toujours d'accord,*" he was far from satisfied

with the compromise, and a fortnight later urged Clemenceau to obtain its revision. But in open discussion he showed an increasing forbearance towards Pershing's ambition to "achieve as soon as possible the formation of a great American Army" that was in marked contrast with Clemenceau's violent impatience. This difference of manner, shown by Foch and Clemenceau respectively, would soon become more accentuated.

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In the weeks that followed this conference G.H.Q. and G.Q.G. were chiefly concerned with the question of the enemy's intention. Haig anticipated a fresh offensive against his front. On May 13th his Intelligence Branch formulated the conclusion that "it seems that an attack on a broad front between Arras and Albert is intended, combined with an attack on the Calonne-Lens front." A fortnight later this would seem a hopelessly bad guess. The first part definitely was so. But the second prediction coincided with Ludendorff's desire, although not with his final decision.

Let us imagine that an agent of the British Intelligence had managed to conceal a dictaphone in Ludendorff's room, only for it to be switched off midway in his discussion of plans. The record would have been as exact up to a point as the British deduction, and yet as vitally incomplete. For, actually, Ludendorff was convinced that the already shaken British must be the target for his decisive blow, and had chosen their front in Flanders as the stage on which he would produce the final drama of victory. But he knew that his April blows had drawn to that sector the bulk of the British and part of the French reserves. It was, he felt, too strongly held at the moment. If his next punch was to smash through it, he must first weaken it by drawing away the French reserves. Hence he reluctantly decided to launch a preliminary attack against the Chemin-des-Dames as a diversion. He hoped that thus, without too much drain on his own reserve balance, he might attract a high proportion of Foch's reserves. As it was the sector nearest Paris, the French, he anticipated, would be all the more likely to yield speedily and whole-heartedly to its power of attraction.

While it was natural that Haig should view his own front as the renewed target of the next German blow, it was surprising that this time Pétain should share his opinion. Relying on his Intelligence branch, he no longer feared an enemy attack in Champagne. Nor did his view change when prisoners taken on May 19th and 22nd declared that a German offensive was being prepared between the Oise and Reims. This was the sector held by Duchesne's Sixth Army, and it included the stretch of line just taken over by the four British divisions that had been sent from Flanders to recuperate in useful tranquillity. Three days later several haggard men scrambled into a British front trench. They were found to be French soldiers who had escaped from a prisoners-of-war camp, and they told of an ominous activity behind the German lines. Masses of fresh troops were arriving, guns were being dug in close up to the front, the prison camps were being hurriedly emptied—hence their own chance of escape. But all the satisfaction the British corps commander received from Duchesne's headquarters was the message: "In our opinion there are no indications that the enemy has made preparations which would enable him to attack tomorrow." Clemenceau also had just received the assurance: "At any rate, there is one place we are comfortable about, and that is the Chemin-des-Dames."

There was one warning which antedated all these. It came from the American G.H.Q. on May 15th, and was based on shrewd deductive reasoning. But because it came from a source that had no direct responsibility, or, more likely, because it came from an "amateur army," it was disregarded. How could it be correct when it conflicted with the diagnosis made by an Intelligence Service that had enjoyed four years of practice, following on forty of preparation?

The American Intelligence branch, however, was pertinacious. The warning was reiterated as more clues were obtained, and eventually the chief of the French Intelligence, Cointet, was won over to its acceptance. But now, as disastrously as at Verdun in 1916, the Operations branch discounted until too late the awakened opinion of its own Intelligence. It was busy working

out offensive schemes of its own at Foch's behest. And, besides, it was nourished on the comforting assurances of Duchesne himself.

What of Foch himself, the summit of the military pyramid? He appears to have shared the view common to Haig and Pétain, that the next blow would again fall on the British front. In accepting this view he was influenced by his theory of war—the enemy ought to concentrate, not disperse their efforts. He was also handicapped by the smallness of his headquarters, and consequently tended to rely especially on Pétain's Intelligence Service.

Furthermore, his attention was given to his own offensive project. It would have been contrary to his theory and his nature to dwell in speculation as to the enemy's intentions when there was the chance of imposing his will on the enemy. "The offensive alone will enable us to bring the battle to a victorious close and, by seizing the initiative, assert our moral ascendancy." But he also sought material profits. His *Directive No. 3*, issued on May 20th, pointed out that "between the Oise and the North Sea important results are to be looked for, so important that in themselves they compel us to take the offensive; these are—between the Oise and the Somme, the disengagement of the Paris-Amiens railway and of the region of Amiens, which, by restoring to our railway system in the north the use of its routes of greatest traffic capacity, will coincidentally improve the provisioning of the country and the connection between the French and British Armies, and will have consequent economic and strategic advantages."

Hence his chief offensive, "to be ready as soon as possible," was a convergent Franco-British attack on either side of Montdidier, where the enemy's front formed a shallow salient. He also asked Haig to prepare an attack in Flanders with the object of disengaging the Béthune coal mines and the Ypres salient.

The primary emphasis given to economic objects is significant. It testifies to a widening of his outlook and a contrast with his pre-war theory. The objects he sought, economic and strategic, were certainly desirable. And the fluid state of the sectors chosen

FOCH, THE MAN OF ORLEANS

was favourable to success. The attack would not have to break through any deeply fortified zone.

One drawback was that it would come along what was, for the enemy, the obvious line of expectation. A more immediate hindrance, however, was that the enemy forestalled Foch with an attack along an unexpected line.

Chapter XVIII

THE WORST TRIAL

NIGHT had drawn its cloak over the Chemin-des-Dames, that blood-soaked ridge north of the Aisne, which within the past four years had become the most famous, or notorious, hill barrier in France. There, for the first time since 1914, the low-voiced talk in the trenches was in the English tongue—at least on the eastern part of the ridge and beyond towards the battered city of Reims. Four divisions that had borne the brunt of the assault in Flanders were taking their “rest.”

Their first impression had been a revelation of unimagined bliss. What a contrast between the drab monotony of the Flanders scene—of its mud and its mists—and this verdant Champagne country in the full radiance of spring! Restful villages still unscathed by war nestled in the valleys amid green corn-fields and leafy vineyards. Even along the trench front itself the scars of earlier battles were hidden by new shoots of grass or a luxuriant growth of fresh foliage. And to men dazed with the continuous concussion of guns the occasional “pop” of some distant piece and the still more infrequent burst of a shell near-by suggested that peace had been tacitly proclaimed on this front.

It seemed too good to be true—this was their first feeling. It was too good to be true—that was their next. In a curiously imperceptible way a day by day increase occurred in the enemy shelling. The incoming troops were the more uneasy because of the defensive arrangements that they found ruling there in the French Sixth Army sector, under General Duchesne, who had been Foch’s first Chief of Staff in the war. Disregarding recent experience and newly developed methods, Duchesne insisted on

the old practice of massing the infantry in the forward positions. Not a yard of ground was to be given up, and everything was to be staked on retaining the battle zone north of the Aisne. When they saw the ground, the British divisional commanders were aghast at this method of defence. They protested that it placed the bulk of their troops, and even their guns, in front of the natural barrier of the Aisne. They pointed out that the divisions might be trapped and ground to dust between the German front and the river, and that, if so, there would be no reserves to check the subsequent onrush of the enemy. They knew only too well, from personal experience of the earlier German thrusts, what this meant.

But as Duchesne had ignored the instructions of his Commander-in-Chief, Pétain, regarding a deep and elastic system of defence, it was not likely that he would heed the protests of his British subordinates. He rebuffed their arguments with a curt and conclusive "J'ai dit." Thus like the neighbouring French divisions, some of them equally anxious, they had to conform to the purblind plan of defence. In compensation they had the dubious comfort of being assured that no attack was probable.

But in the afternoon of May 26th a different assurance came—over the telephone from the rear. The signallers jotted it down in their pink message slips before hurrying out to seek the staff officers of their respective brigades. "The enemy will attack on a wide front at 0100 hours tomorrow 27th inst. aaa." The face of life had been changed by this simple sentence—a sentence of execution. The peaceful prospect had faded as abruptly as a film.

Early that morning a German patrol had stumbled into the arms of a French one, and left two of its number as prisoners. Under an examination, euphemistically termed "special," these men had disclosed that a great attack would be launched next morning. This warning had at last dispelled scepticism.

With darkness comes an unnatural hush. How the hours drag! The hour after midnight longest of all. "Whizz-plop!"—all along the line gas-shells flit to earth and burst with their soft, sucking sound. Doves of the storm, not of peace. They came so

fast and thick that the air seemed alive with them. And the earth was soon drenched with the smell of gas. Ten minutes later it was upheaved as if by an earthquake, and the darkness was rent by the flame of myriad explosions. Nearly four thousand guns had opened fire, drowning the pitiful bark of the Allied artillery, while serried trench mortars heaved their cans of high explosive on to the trenches of the infantry. For two and a half hours the luckless troops had to endure a bombardment unparalleled, according to the verdict of the more experienced sufferers, in intensity. And the ordeal of those hours of helpless endurance was the more trying to the survivors, who sat in dug-outs that rocked and reeked, because they were semi-suffocated in gas masks. If these masks, the damp-blanketed doorways, and the lighted braziers kept out the gas they also kept out the air.

Meantime what had been happening on the other side of No Man's Land? What was happening now could neither be seen nor heard. But why had so little been noticed earlier? Because of secrecy and camouflage *in excelsis*. Every German artillery wheel had wood-wool wired on to its tyre; every axle was wired with a leather covering; every horse's hoofs were muffled in rags; every chain, ring, shield or ladder, was wrapped in straw.

On the railways, no car was allowed to have a label, no troops were allowed to move out of the stations in daylight. On the roads, vehicles were to bear no distinguishing marks, and troops to make no movement by day except in small bodies. And if any such body was caught on the open road when enemy's observing aircraft appeared, it was instantly to turn about as if marching away from the front. Among the inhabitants, all persons were to be re-examined and houses to be searched. In military offices, even the locks on desks and cupboards were to be tested.

The guns were all brought up and ensconced in hiding-places by the night of the 25th. The following night they were man-handled into their positions for firing. To feed them, close on two million shells were carried up and dumped in concealment. The attacking infantry began to arrive on the 16th, creeping closer by nightly stages to woods where they could be hidden by day.

They were not even allowed to light fires. Then, when darkness fell on the 26th, they moved up to their starting-line just before the bombardment opened.

Another formidable problem lay in front of their starting line. For here the little River Ailette ran through No Man's Land, and they would have to cross it before they could begin their assault on the lofty ridge. Of foot-bridges alone twenty-four were needed for each divisional sector. All this material had to be brought up and hidden near the bank.

Success was aided by a strange freak that had a flavour of Aristophanes' immortal comedy. The river bottom swarmed with frogs. And the frogs' nightly concert made a deafening noise which cloaked the preliminaries. The actual bridging on the fateful night was only begun when the greater orchestra of the bombardment blazed forth.

Nature, too, lent its cloak to the German infantry, for in some parts at least an early morning mist deepened obscurity created by the smoke shells. Thus once again, as in the earlier breaches of the British front, a blanket enveloped the machine-guns of the defence. A vital asset to the attack, and one without which no real break-through ever took place on the Western Front.

At 3.35 a.m. the assaulting infantry crawled forward to the edge of their own wall of bursting shells. Five minutes later the barrage moved on and a torrent of Germans swept over the Allied parapets. In the main attack fifteen fresh German divisions, with seven more following close in support, were hurled against five.

The front-line troops were soon overwhelmed. The first news that reached one rear headquarters was the astonishing report: "Enemy balloons rising from our front lines." By massing his troops north of the Aisne, Duchesne had all too well ensured that once the German guns had made a bloated meal of the compressed cannon-fodder, the German infantry would find few reserves to block their passage through the rear zones.

Their onrush was so swift through the French sector in the centre that by 10 a.m. they had reached the Aisne, five miles in rear, and seized the crossings along a ten-mile frontage from

Vailly to Euilly. In this achievement they were again much helped by Duchesne, who had sent the one French division that was in support on the river forward to be engulfed in the maelstrom. The unguarded bridges were captured before the demolition charges were even prepared. The grey tidal wave swept on through the open channel in the centre, and by evening it had reached the Vesle. Three days later it reached the Marne—site of the great ebb of 1914. After nearly four years a menace deemed for ever past had returned to a point that endowed it with a demoralising symbolism. Happily for France it proved to be “thus far and no farther.”

The ultimate damming of the flood was helped by an initial check placed upon it by Ludendorff's orders. Intending only a diversion, he had limited the objective to the high ground south of the Vesle. And on reaching that line on the morning of the 28th, the Germans halted. In the evening, recovering from surprise at his own astonishing success, Ludendorff decided to push in more reserves and to push on along two directions—south towards the Marne and south-west towards Paris.

As a result, the resistance on the easterly flank near Reims was reknit with the aid of French reserves that arrived to reinforce the British remnants. Then, in turn, the Germans were checked on the south by the barrier of the Marne. From May 31st onwards they threw their weight into the south-western corner of the great new bulge they had made, striving to push down the corridor between the Ourcq and the Marne that led towards Paris.

Hitherto the French reserves had been thrown into the battle as they arrived, and on attempting to stem the flood were caught up and carried back by it. But on June 1st Pétain issued orders for the further reserves coming up to form instead a ring in rear. Digging themselves in, they would thus have ready, before the German flood reached them, a vast semicircular dam which would stop and confine its now slackening flow. The calculation was justified. For when the flood beat against this dam in the first days of June its momentum was too spent, its force too diminished, to make much impression.

Château Thierry was the furthest point attained on the road to

Paris, and there the erosion was checked by the American 2nd Division, which proved both a material and a moral cement to the line of their weary allies. Thus the menace to Paris passed, and with it the danger of a general collapse of the French front.

As Plumer had, under Haig, directed the defence in Flanders, so the measures that closed the wider breach in Champagne were due to Pétain. It is difficult to put one's finger on any point where Foch exercised a decisive influence. The fact that the one battle was as exclusively within the French sphere as the other had been within the British sphere tended to make higher direction superfluous.

One finds, moreover, that Pétain gave orders for the movement of reserves first and informed Foch later, even when they were taken from behind the Franco-British joint. Within twenty-four hours of the break-through Pétain had moved sixteen divisions to the scene. They included all four divisions of the Fifth Army, which had been placed in reserve behind Amiens to support the British. Foch could only approve the step already taken. On the 29th Pétain denuded the Montdidier sector of reserves and also asked Foch for the Tenth Army, posted behind Arras, and the whole force in Flanders. Foch conceded the former, which was dispatched next day. This removed all the French reserves that had hitherto lain ready to support the British front and the Allied joint. "To remedy this source of weakness" Foch confided to Haig the duty of supporting the joint as well as his own front. He also warned Haig that he might have to call upon the British general reserve which Haig was just building up again.

On the 31st Pétain "urgently requested" that at least part of the French force in Flanders and also the American divisions that were training in the British zone should be put at his disposal. Pétain's message came while Foch was in the middle of an interview with Haig. Foch drove off at once to see Pétain, and Weygand came back into the room to tell the British that the situation was "very grave" and the "troops very exhausted."

But Foch was now beginning to feel that Pétain's demands were excessive, and, on meeting him, declared that he had now sufficient reserves to restore the situation. Foch also decided to move

his headquarters nearer to the spot, so that he could keep a closer watch on the situation. Next day he moved to Mouchy-le-Châtel, and a few days later settled himself at Bombon, north-east of Melun, in "a domain of tranquillity, silence, and meditative seclusion." It came to be known in the French Army as the "Monastery of Bombon," a nickname that had a dual aptness. For it was an abode not merely of quiet, but of faith.

On June 2nd Foch gave Pétain a note to guide him in dealing with the situation. But its prescriptions were of an extremely broad nature. They merely told Pétain "to stop the enemy's advance on Paris at all costs," and that "the means consists of a foot-by-foot defence of the ground in this direction, pursued with the utmost energy." If it did not require a great military brain to frame such instructions, only a Foch could have generated the electric currents or developed the vocal force that made them stimulating—and gave them a helpful sound to the ears of the commanders at the front. So also at the rear his air of calm confidence had a soothing effect. When asked at Versailles about the situation, he replied, "*Pas mal. Les vagues diminuent*," and reinforced his point by drawing a simple diagram to show how each day's surge became less. A sound theory.

Foch also took a practical step—which had a complicated sequel. In response to Pétain's renewed appeal he arranged with Pershing that the five American divisions in the British zone should be moved to the French, there to take over quiet sectors. And he asked Haig to move three British reserve divisions down to the Somme behind Amiens, ready to intervene if necessary.

Next day Pétain pressed for the immediate intervention of these divisions, and of more to follow. It was the story of March reversed. Foch hastened the dispatch of the American divisions, but told Pétain that it would be dangerous to strip the British still further. He nevertheless wrote to warn Haig that if the Germans pursued their advance towards Paris or widened its front, "all the Allied forces would have to give their aid in a battle which, in all probability, would decide the fate of the war." Hence he asked that Haig would prepare to send south all his available reserves, both general and local, and also to consider

a thinning out of his front line. Foch's justification for so drastic a proposal lay in a fresh cause of anxiety. Pétain had warned him that a fresh German attack was imminent, an extension northward of their original offensive. And by an overestimate of the German strength the new menace seemed more dangerous than it was.

* * * * *

Foch's demand caused an explosion at G.H.Q. which had its echo in the British Cabinet. But barely recovering from the tremendous battle strain of March and April, Haig had seen his much-cracked front stripped in a few days of all its French and American reserves. He had suffered this unprotestingly, although rather aggrieved that he had not been consulted. It was natural, too, that he should compare the rapidity in rushing reserves south with the tardiness of their dispatch north. And he was the more disquieted because of signs that the Germans were preparing a fresh attack in Flanders. Hence he made formal protest to Foch and used his right of appeal to his own Government.

The atmosphere in London was sympathetic to his appeal. The Government were dismayed by the way their Allies and the Allied Commander-in-Chief had been so utterly taken by surprise, and were shocked by the sacrifice of the divisions sent to "rest" on the Aisne. Wilson had become more concerned when he saw that Foch was stripping both the Amiens joint and the whole line north of it, while at the same time he set his face against any shortening of the line. What would happen if the British had to fall back south? "By weakening his centre, by not carrying out salt-water floods, and by not shortening his line, Foch is making certain that this decision cannot be carried out."

On the 5th, when Haig's appeal was received, Wilson warned the War Cabinet that, in his opinion, Foch was gambling with disaster—to the British Army. Wilson temporarily had lost his former veneration for Foch's genius. "It is simply damned nonsense saying he won't '*lâcher un pied*,' and then run from the Chemin-des-Dames to Château Thierry."

Milner and Wilson were deputed to go over to France. If they had left a stormy atmosphere they found a worse storm

raging in Paris, a black sky lit by lurid flashes of political lightning. The rather contemptuous composure which had prevailed during the British set-backs had utterly dispersed. Parliament, Press, and public sought relief for their feelings in a clamour for scapegoats—their traditional safety-valve. In Duchesne's case it was amply justified. But the greater outburst was directed at Foch and Pétain. Clemenceau did not escape, and was threatened with overthrow if he did not sacrifice these two.

In such a maelstrom Clemenceau was in his favourite element. He countered challenge with defiance, and gave unflinching support to his chosen instruments, declaring, "We must have confidence in Foch and Pétain, those two great chiefs who are so happily complementary to each other." But he insisted, as the price of this support, on the necessity of "cutting off the dead wood" by the dismissal of a large number of the executive commanders "who had grown old and ought to be replaced." "Foch certainly knew it as well as I did, perhaps even better, but, as with many chiefs, the phrase 'old comrade' was a very potent charm with him."

When Clemenceau produced a list of those to be relieved Foch made no demur, save that he asked Clemenceau to spare those of his "old comrades" who were on inactive parts of the front, "promising that if the occasion called for it he would rigorously apply the same standard."

It was under this double pressure from front and rear that Clemenceau and Foch had to meet the flank pressure of the British deputation. The meeting took place at the Hotel Crillon on the afternoon of June 7th. After Haig had given his reasons for protest, Foch subtly argued that there was no ground for it, since he was only asking Haig to make plans for moving his divisions, not to move them. According to Wilson, "Foch then said he was sure that Haig would only protest in future if he [Foch] committed '*des imprudences*,' and that in that case he would agree with the Field-Marshal." "Foch repeated that if the Boches attacked on a big front from the Somme to the Marne he would call on Haig for all his reserves, as this would mean that the whole Boche strength was being used. Haig agreed to

this, but asked why Foch thought such an attack likely, as all information pointed to heavy attacks south of La Bassée and between Hazebrouck and Kemmel, and as preparations were now so forward that these could be delivered in forty-eight hours." If Haig's fear of the enemy's intention was justified, Foch this time had gauged their immediate action.

Milner now intervened to reconcile the opposing points of view. "He asked if it were Foch's intention to withdraw any more American divisions, and Foch said it was not. Haig complained that Foch had withdrawn both the American and the French divisions without informing him. I never saw old Foch so nonplussed. He simply had not a word to say. Clemenceau said that such a proceeding was impossible, and must never happen again."

The meeting broke up in a better atmosphere, with the tension eased by frank expression of feeling. The discussion had clarified the relative positions of Foch and Haig, and had shown that Haig's right of appeal to his own Government was a reality. The significance of the episode is to be traced in Foch's subsequent attitude towards his nominal subordinates, towards Pershing no less than towards Haig. He realised the limitations of the title of Commander-in-Chief when that title was followed by the word "Allied," a word that was an amplification in sound, but a qualification in fact.

If understanding brought disappointment to Foch, he adapted himself to the conditions with notable wisdom and tact. Henceforth his "directions" would not be commands, but wishes, or, more often, a formal deed of agreement.

* * * * *

On June 9th the new German offensive was launched against the sector Noyon-Montdidier in an attempt to break through south-westwards and break down the buttress that separated the Somme bulge from the Marne bulge. But it was both too late and too soon. While too late to coincide with the pressure on the other side of the buttress, the preparations had been so hurried as to forfeit secrecy. Thus the French had discerned the

intention, and were ready to parry the blow. It was lighter, indeed, than they expected. For while they calculated that the enemy would launch forty-five divisions, and still have a balance of reserves in hand, Hutier had only thirteen divisions, and not all these attacked. To face them Humbert had seven divisions holding the first position, with five more in the second.

Yet there was a moment of danger—needless danger. To meet the attack Pétain had experimented with his new method of elastic defence, a development of the earlier German method. Its keynote was to hold the first position lightly, sufficient to act as a brake on the enemy's advance, while a thoroughly prepared resistance awaited them on the second position when their momentum was spent. But the experiment partly miscarried owing to the innate conservatism of the commanders on the spot. Unfortunately they could plead in excuse Foch's latest directive, which ordained "*a foot-by-foot defence of the ground.*"

The consequence of the miscarriage was that the Germans, after breaking through the first position, were able to press on and occupy a seven-mile stretch of the second by 11 a.m. But the French local reserves then slowed up the enemy's progress, which was brought to a standstill soon after crossing the Matz. Meantime Fayolle was preparing a prompt answer in the form of a counter-stroke against the enemy's flank before they had time to consolidate their position. For this purpose five fresh divisions were brought up and placed under the fiery Mangin. He struck early on the 11th, and although his thrust did not penetrate far into the enemy's flank it quenched their new flickering impulse to advance. Greater than its material effect was its moral stimulus. The Germans' first recoil, it was hailed by the French as an omen of a greater. And, unlike most omens, was fulfilled.

To Foch himself it was an inspiration. When Fayolle had been inclined to curb Mangin's wish to strike on the 11th, favouring a more careful preparation, Foch had intervened with the decisive words, "Let him." But when Mangin had wished to continue pushing against hardening resistance, Foch had wisely imposed a check. As he remarked, "It was always necessary to stop Mangin." His purpose in breaking off this counter-stroke as soon

as it had yielded a profit was not to hoard reserves but to invest them in fresh offensive projects.

These projects had become both more practical and more limited than in the past. And in them a dual purpose was combined—to ease the strain on Foch's own lateral communications while upsetting the enemy's offensive plans. But, in the outcome, none of these projects would come to fruition before the enemy's next offensive—although there was an interval of over a month. The projects show Foch's practical belief in his theory of freedom of action, if they are also proof that he did not contemplate the possibilities of luring Ludendorff into vast salients that he himself could strike in flank—yet another popular legend that is wind-blown by history.

The long lull in the campaign brought no calm into Foch's cabinet. No sooner had he smoothed over the trouble with Haig than he was embroiled with Pétain. The German attack on June 9th had instantly aroused in Pétain a hunger for British reserves, but Foch had curbed his desire to be given the three divisions placed behind Amiens, and the early passing of the danger had justified the restraint.

Then, on the 16th, Foch issued a note on the method of defence to be adopted in meeting a fresh German blow. The note was in characteristically broad outline, save for the one point that both the first and second positions should be occupied "in sufficient strength" as soon as an attack was foreseen. To Pétain's mind this proposal suggested a too uniform and too thin spread of the available forces. His own newly prescribed method was that a thin covering line should act as a buffer to absorb the shock and recoil gradually on the strongly held main position. He refused to pass on Foch's note, and appealed to Clemenceau. Nor was it his only ground of appeal. Foch, anticipating that the next German blow would fall in Flanders, had instructed Pétain to reinforce the French artillery there and to develop the arrangements for sending French divisions there at short notice.

Like Haig before him, Pétain seems to have jumped to the conclusion that preparation was equivalent to execution. He protested that the French Armies had been engaged continuously

since March, while "the British Armies have already had two months in which to recuperate and incorporate their reinforcements. On their front of ninety-four miles there is a density of infantry and artillery such as it has never been possible to realise in any of my armies. . . . The British Armies, therefore, are in a position to look after themselves, so giving the French Armies time in their turn to resist a new blow towards Paris ; and this is bound to come."

The appeal placed Clemenceau in a dilemma, for Pétain was protecting the immediate interests of France. But he had a horror of command by compromise, and he boldly determined to take the risk of reducing its evils, even at the risk of the French front. Hence, he not merely gave his support to Foch, but also, to prevent fresh arguments when action was necessary, gave the decision that the right of appeal conferred on the Commander-in-Chief at Beauvais would no longer apply to the French Army.

Foch took early advantage of this unfettered authority to place his veto on instructions that Pétain had just issued for a preventive withdrawal in Lorraine in case that thinly held sector was menaced. A more drastic step still was his sudden replacement of Pétain's Chief of Staff by an officer of more "offensive" character. Pétain, who had not been consulted on the change, was much annoyed ; the incident produced a lively exchange of letters.

But at the same time Foch sought to remove a source of friction by sorting out the French and British forces. With this object he suggested that Haig should return the French contingent in Flanders, receiving back the British divisions posted behind Amiens, and also what remained of the luckless divisions that had been trapped on the Aisne.

This regrouping had scarcely been arranged, however, when it was upset by a fresh demand for British reserves, due to a change in Foch's line of expectation.

In the middle of June, after his debate with Haig, Foch had come to share the British view that the next German stroke would be a renewed one in Flanders. But by the end of the month he came to a different conclusion. In his *directive No. 4* of July 1st

he pointed out that the enemy were barely forty miles distant from both Abbeville and Paris, that an advance of twenty-five miles towards Abbeville would be sufficient for them to sever the communications between the French and British Armies, while a still shorter step towards Paris would have a great moral effect. These, then, were the two most vital directions which must be guarded above all, although the Allied forces must be ready to parry diversions in Flanders or Champagne.

We see that Foch was still inclined to assume that his opponent would take the course that seemed strategically ideal irrespective of tactical handicaps. Because Abbeville or Paris were the most dangerous directions in Foch's opinion, he implied that Ludendorff's choice would fall on one or other of them. Foch was still following the line of reasoning for which, as a professor, he had castigated the elder Moltke. And his assumption was the wider of the mark because the basis adopted by Ludendorff for his offensive campaigns in 1918 was that "tactics had to be considered before purely strategical objects which it is futile to pursue unless tactical success be possible." The basic idea underlying his plans was thus, in fact, the exact reverse of that which Foch ascribed to him. The assumption had, as we have seen, proved a repeated pitfall for Foch. But hard experience had made him wary of clinging to it, and alert to seize on any definite evidence of the enemy's intention.

This time, fortunately, the evidence would become unmistakable, through the enemy's belated haste to mount his attack on a new sector and consequent failure to conceal his preparations. Pétain's Intelligence gathered an impressive array of evidence that the new offensive would come in Champagne—an array perhaps all the stronger because they and their chief considered that the enemy ought to strike in Champagne, so as to draw the French reserves away from the Paris and Abbeville directions. At an interview with Pétain on July 5th, Foch was so far persuaded that Champagne was the chosen sector that he told Pétain to reinforce that sector. Six days later, on July 11th, he gave Pétain permission to draw reserves from his left near Amiens and asked the British to move four divisions south to replace

them as a support to the Franco-British joint. Haig was absent in England, but Lawrence at once agreed to meet Foch's request. On July 13th Foch increased his demand to eight divisions, asking that the original four should be placed unreservedly at his disposal. They would be sent to Champagne. Lawrence again agreed, and Haig approved the decision on his return to France next day.

But Foch's request did not escape objection. This time it came from Lloyd George, who naturally remembered Haig's previous appeal, and did not know as well as Haig how well the British Army had recovered from its earlier trials. On Lloyd George's initiative a telegram was sent to Haig telling him that if he thought his force was being endangered, or that Foch's request had a political motive in the background, he was to make a fresh appeal under the Beauvais agreement.

It is somewhat paradoxical that Lloyd George's readiness to support Haig on this occasion should subsequently have been made a reproach against him by Haig's partisans. At the time Haig seems to have found encouragement in the telegram. For although he did not consider an appeal necessary, as soon as the German offensive had been launched and had failed, he wrote to Foch asking for the return of his four divisions. He softened the shock by a verbal message that "if British troops were wanted to exploit a success, they would, of course, be available." Whether he would have insisted on the return of these divisions will never be known. For by the time he received Foch's refusal he had also received news of the dramatic opening and success of Foch's counter-offensive. In that his divisions shared. By it the menace of his own front was first relieved and then removed.

Not least would be the relief to Foch himself. Sore had been the trials to which his faith had been subjected, the strain multiplied by the difficulty, which was at least testimony to his impartiality, of satisfying either his countrymen or his allies.

In this time of stress, religion had been his true consolation and Bombon his haven. A headquarters where bustle and display were as curtailed as the size of the staff, its régime had the austere

simplicity and regularity of life in a cloister. The "society" rose at seven o'clock, lunched at noon, dined at seven, went to bed at ten or eleven. Punctuality of meals was invariable, and unpunctuality of attendance a cardinal sin. Even the menu was regular, and the fare simple. Foch liked his food, but was far from being a gourmet, still farther from a gourmand. "I never take more than I need." With the meal, a couple of glasses of wine. "It's enough and, in everything, I like moderation." But there was an exception—smoking. "That's my one vice." If he ate quickly it was in part because he was "always in a hurry to get back to his pipe"—a British gift which had lured him away from his old love, a coarse and evil-smelling brand of cheap cigar. It used to be said that he was mute with his first cigar, animated with his second, and sparkling with his third. His puffs became his verbal punctuation marks.

But he found a higher form of solace in a different form of incense. For he would often rise at six and walk to the village church to attend matins and, on Sundays, High Mass. There he would be seen "following in his book the prayers of the Mass . . . and, when the tinkle of the bell announced the beautiful invocation 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,' humbly kneeling and so remaining until the end of the oblation of the divine sacrifice," to rise refreshed and enheartened for the task that awaited him.

On one occasion Mordacq came to Bombon with an urgent message from Clemenceau and found that Foch was in church. After a long wait Foch appeared and explained: "You see, when I have some free moments—and that does not often happen—I spend them in this abode. Nevertheless I'm a bad Christian, for frequently, instead of praying, I allow myself to slip into meditation, and naturally in meditation on profane matters, on the operations I'm preparing, but the Lord, I'm sure, will not be angry with me. For always, when I leave His temple, I feel stronger and above all less uncertain; it's there very often that I've taken the most grave decisions on the war."

It was on a Sunday morning during the crisis of the German onslaught that Clemenceau himself hurried out from Paris to see

Foch. On arrival he was told that Foch was at Mass. Clemenceau, the lifelong free-thinker, at once said : " Don't disturb him. It has acted too well on him for that. I'll wait." In Clemenceau's view, religion was to Foch what, in Lincoln's, whiskey had been to Grant. The former's view was certainly true. Foch himself said : " Once my motto was Knowledge and Faith. I still keep it, but now say, rather, Faith and Knowledge. Yes, Faith first." He added : " For that is what matters more."

Chapter XIX

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

ONE of the most curiously symbolical features of Foch's career during the war was his attachment to a Louis XVI pendulum clock supported on white marble columns which had stood in his room when, in 1914, he had his headquarters in the Town Hall of Cassel. In 1918 his desire for this clock was gratified by its presentation to him. Nothing could have been more like a pendulum than the campaign of that year—first, a prolonged rhythmic swing to the German side, and then back to the Allied side. Like a pendulum, also, was the beat of the German offensive during the first half of the eight months' campaign. Each time the hour struck with fateful consistency before Foch was able to launch his own premeditated stroke. Nor was he forestalled only in France.

On May 7th he had exhorted Diaz not to be content with a defensive attitude, but to take the offensive as soon as possible, and on June 12th reiterated his demand. Three days later the Austrians launched their first and last offensive of 1918, Conrad striking south from the Trentino against the Italian flank while Boroëvic assaulted their front. Conrad's blow was soon parried, but Boroëvic's armies captured half the Montello and forced the passage of the Piave—only to be forced to withdraw across it. And the loss of nearly 100,000 men in this vain offensive bankrupted Austria's military power.

Austria's bankruptcy foreshadowed that of her greater partner—which would declare itself earlier. Between March and June the Germans had lost nearly 700,000 men. By their intense and sustained offensive they had reduced themselves to insolvency. For the first time in the war their expenditure had exceeded, far

exceeded, and already exceeded at the half-year the annual intake of youths arriving at the age of sacrifice. Moloch was still hungry, and could not be fed. In revenge he would consume his priests.

How pitifully puny then would Ludendorff look beside the malign force he had unloosed. A feeble wriggle in its grip and he would become limp. By contrast the figure of Foch would swell until in the popular imagination he bestrode the war like a Colossus. Yet he too, his own spirit apart, was almost as much the plaything of material forces. For months like a Gulliver in Brobdingnag he had gallantly shouted his challenge and chanted his "offensive" refrain. For months like the immortal Mrs. Partington he had applied his mop to the task of sweeping back the ocean. The next time he swung his mop forward the ocean would recede. At each further swing it would go back further. The tide of material forces had turned. The ebb had begun. Mankind, lovers of the marvellous, would see the ebbing tide as the miraculous achievement of a master hand. They forgot that twenty-seven double-sized American divisions had now arrived in France. They easily ignored the dwindling balance of German reserves, the straits of hunger to which the German Army and people were now reduced, and the demoralisation which follows in the wake of disappointment when an army finds that it has expended its last ounce of energy in vain.

Filled with the intoxication of victory, the Allied peoples were not disposed to weigh the factors which had brought it. They were eager to see and acclaim a miracle-worker who had turned the cold water of the spring into the wine of the summer. A discriminating analysis could be left to history. Hence legend had a long start.

But it is right to emphasise that such post-prandial delusions were not shared by some of the caterers while the table was being set. After checking the German attack of June 9th, Pétain forsook his natural caution and declared: "If we can hold on until the end of June, our situation will be excellent. In July we can resume the offensive; after that, victory will be ours." The prophecy, so accurate in fulfilment, was based not on inspiration but merely on a sober calculation of the factors.

If Foch did not utter any such precise forecast, he seems to have gauged by "feel" the change that Pétain timed by calculation. For when Wilson visited him on July 1st Foch expressed the opinion that the Germans were puzzled as to what they should do next, and surprised Wilson by the remark that all great anxiety would be past within ten days. Wilson did not share his confidence, and thought that not until "the mud in November" would the Allies "be quite safe" and anxiety removed. Foch further suggested that the Austrian Empire would soon break up in revolution. To hasten the process he was not only urging Diaz to expedite an offensive on the Italian front, but was also promoting plans for an offensive in Salonika, whither Franchet d'Esperey was sent to take command, as a spur to the enterprise.*

Foch's surmise as to Ludendorff's perplexity was a shrewd one. For Ludendorff still adhered to his guiding idea that the British should be the target for his final blow, and, contrary to Foch's opinion, planned to deliver it in Flanders. But he reluctantly came to the conclusion that "the enemy in Flanders were still so strong that the German Army could not yet attack there." Hence he determined on yet another diversion, although ready to develop it if the chances were promising. It was to be made by forty-nine divisions attacking on either side of Reims, and the date was fixed for July 10th—subsequently postponed to the 15th because preparations were incomplete. The principal punch would be by the left fist towards Châlons while the right fist pushed across the Marne and then swung towards Epernay, converging on the target of the left fist. Ludendorff intended that his decisive blow in Flanders should in any case follow five

* This project at once became a source of grievance to Wilson, whose demand that Clemenceau's orders for the offensive should be cancelled and the case submitted to the Versailles Committee was only defeated by Foch's threat to resign. It would seem that Wilson's opposition was due as much to personal ambition as to honest doubt, for he was at the moment preparing an attractive scheme by which, while Foch's authority would be confined to France and Italy, supreme charge of all other theatres should be given to himself. He was chagrined to find that neither Lloyd George nor Milner favoured this creation of a fresh duality of control.

days later. On the 16th, actually, as soon as the Reims attack was under way, artillery and aircraft would be sent off by train to Flanders, and Ludendorff himself moved thither to supervise the staging and production of his final drama of victory. But the curtain failed to rise. The cord was severed by a French counterstroke that had not been designed as such.

As part of his own scheme of partial offensives, Foch had given Pétain orders on June 14th "to prepare an offensive whose objective would be the capture of the high ground commanding Soissons on the west." Foch's idea was that if he could bring the artery of communications under artillery fire "any German offensive towards Château-Thierry would be deprived of its life-blood." The rôle of tourniquet was assigned to Mangin, who had been given command of the Tenth Army. On June 28th he made a preliminary attack to gain a good starting-line and then, to dissemble his greater intentions, withdrew his reserves well to the rear.

In the first week of July Pétain formed the idea of utilising this stroke as a retort to the German offensive that he was now expecting. His plan comprised three phases—first, to bring the advance to a halt by a buffer-like resistance; second, to deliver immediate counter-attacks against the sides of the pocket they had made on each side of Reims; third, when the German reserves had been pushed into those pockets, to launch Mangin's army in a real counter-offensive against the enemy's rear. If Mangin pushed far enough eastward along the base-line of the main Marne salient, he might convert it into a sack for the German forces that filled it.

Events and Foch combined to modify this conception.

Foch was unwilling to wait upon the enemy's action, and preferred prevention to cure, hoping that his own stroke might upset the enemy's. He now decided that whether the enemy attacked or not, he would enlarge his own offensive into a great converging effort to drive the enemy out of the Marne salient. Hence on July 9th he instructed Pétain that Berthelot's Fifth Army should attack the eastern side while Mangin attacked the western. He also desired that Degoutte's Sixth Army, which lay

between Mangin and the Marne, should prolong the front of Mangin's attack southwards to Château-Thierry and join in the eastward push.

The enlargement of the French plan of offensive naturally caused a delay. This helped to deceive the Germans, who had gained information of a forestalling attack; when it did not come on the 14th, as expected, they assumed that their own intentions had not been discovered. The delay was also convenient for Pétain. On the 13th he was able to assure Foch that the German offensive was imminent, and he gained Foch's agreement to the idea that the French offensive should become a counter-offensive—to be released after the enemy had struck.

It was not the only persuasive success that Pétain achieved. A week's argument was needed before he could induce the lion-hearted Gouraud, commanding the Fourth Army east of Reims, to adopt the method of elastic defence and swallow the unpalatable idea of a voluntary yielding of his forward position. When success crowned the device, the world would ring with applause of "*Gouraud's manœuvre*!"

On July 14th an evening raid captured prisoners who disclosed that the German bombardment would begin ten minutes after midnight. And with this last-hour discovery of the exact hour, the last vestige of surprise was stripped from the German offensive. Thus, east of Reims, before the German infantry advanced from their trenches they had been trapped and riven by the French counter-bombardment. Then, in turn, they were thinned out by the machine-guns of the French outpost line. Their momentum had so slackened, their mass so shrunk, that when they reached the real position of resistance they failed to make even a crack in it.

West of Reims, however, the elastic method was incompletely applied, because of the desire to hold the Marne. In consequence, the first position was held in force, its defenders were overwhelmed, and the waves of attack flowed on to deepen the south-eastern corner of the great bulge made in May. The Germans not only pushed across the Marne but behind Reims, so that they threatened to undercut this buttress of the French line. Although

the attack petered out next day, the threat had already had a far-reaching effect.

To avert the danger Pétain promptly decided to execute the second phase of his plan with a counter-attack against the two flanks of the new pocket made south of the Marne. But the reserves available for the purpose had already been absorbed in the defensive battle, so that Pétain was constrained to draw on those of Degoutte and Mangin. In consequence he telephoned an order to postpone the arrangements for Mangin's counter-offensive, which was due to be ready on the 18th.

Foch was on his way to meet Haig when, calling at Fayolle's headquarters, he heard of Pétain's message. Full of eagerness to strike, he was aghast at any postponement, and for security counted on his theory of the "waves." He at once telephoned to Pétain to say that there must "be no question of retarding, far less of stopping Mangin's preparations." He added that not only must Mangin and Degoutte strike on the 18th, but also Mitry's Ninth Army, south of the Marne. Foch's feeling was epitomised in a comment that had immediate reference to Fayolle: "He does not know the advantages of speed. He likes his task cut up into portions, but I do not; I prefer a tremendous rush."

Hence at 4.35 a.m. on July 18th the armies of Mangin and Degoutte swept forward on their easterly drive. As their assembly had been concealed by the thickly wooded country around Villers-Cotterets, so their assault was unheralded by any preliminary bombardment. They used instead the "Cambrai key," the sudden release of a mass of tanks to smash the wire and precede the infantry waves. The possession and success of this key vindicated Pétain's building programme of 1917. Even so, it was not possible to endow Degoutte with tanks as bountifully as Mangin, who had 375, and thus, after overcoming the German outposts, Degoutte's infantry had to pause while a one and a half hours' bombardment of the Germans' main line of resistance was carried out. The chief weight of man-power was also with Mangin, who had ten divisions in the first line and eight to back them up, while Degoutte had originally only one with which to reinforce his leading six. The disproportion was justified

by the greater menace to the enemy of Mangin's line of advance—across the enemy's rear.

His opening success was complete ; a long bound was made, and 10,000 prisoners were taken before evening. But for all his fiery ardour he soon found difficulty in fulfilling Foch's instruction that "the battle now in progress should aim at the destruction of the enemy's forces south of the Aisne and the Vesle. It must be pursued with the utmost energy and without any loss of time, so as to exploit the advantage gained by surprise." Mangin's attempt to push a cavalry corps through was a farcical failure, proving once again the unsuitability of such an obsolete instrument. And on the second day the resistance stiffened as the Germans brought reserves to hold back the advance which, like a sliding door, threatened to close their exits from the salient. By order after order Foch sought to give momentum to the sliding door, demanding that the effort "must be intensified to the highest possible degree." But once the surprise effect had passed, orders were no more effective to overcome machine-guns than they had ever been. And Foch had to watch an inverted example of his "diminishing waves" theory.

The fact that the Allied left wing (Mangin and Degoutte) had been launched to its counter-offensive while the right wing was still on the defensive had meant the dropping of the second phase of Pétain's programme. This nullified the idea that the right wing should draw off the enemy's reserves, by pinching his pocket south of the Marne, before the left wing attempted its bigger aim—of netting the whole salient. When the right wing was able to join in the offensive, on July 20th, and develop a converging pressure, the left wing had lost momentum. Thus the Germans, fighting hard for room to breathe, gained the time they required to draw the bulk of their forces out of the sack, although they left 30,000 men behind as prisoners.

Once they were safely back on a straight and much shortened line along the Vesle, Ludendorff felt able on August 2nd to order preparations for fresh attacks in Flanders and east of Montdidier. Within a week his offensive dreams were finally dissipated, but it is historically important to realise that it was not the dramatic

counter-stroke of July 18th which dissipated them. Unlike "Foch's counter-stroke" in the First Battle of the Marne, the fame of his counter-stroke in the Second Battle of the Marne has a solid foundation. But if the first suffered in effect because it hit nothing, the second suffered from hitting too solid a resistance, and thus fell short of decisive results. It is arguable that Foch's impetuosity in overruling Pétain's calculated conception led to the forfeit of such results. On the other hand, it is proverbial that opportunities in war are fleeting. Foch had no wish to "arrive at the station two or three minutes after the train had gone." We now know, as Foch could not know, that there was little risk of missing the opportunity by postponement. But there is not such clear evidence that delay would have improved the opportunity in the Second Battle of the Marne, as there is that delay would have forfeited the opportunity in the first battle.

Moreover, the first taste of victory after such deep and bitter draughts of defeat was an incalculable stimulant to the Allies, and its depressing effect on the Germans the greater by contrast of the past. Thus Foch, ever concerned with the moral factors, was well content. In a letter on the 20th he summed up his view of the main result: "The Germans needed to gain a decision quickly. They haven't gained it. That's a great result for us. . . ."

His private feelings also found vent: "We're holding them. We're hitting them in flank. We're kicking and punching them. We're killing off the enemy. Our dead . . . my son . . . my son-in-law . . . are avenged." That he could now lift his own self-imposed ban of silence was significant of his assurance.

Having gained the initiative, he would keep it—by sheer vigour of hitting. Not for him a chessboard conception of war. Battle for him was a physical process, even on its highest plane. The primitive fighting instinct had taken possession of him. His strategy was simple, not the complex masterpiece of art which legend has depicted. It was best expressed in his own vivid illustration: "War is like this. Here is an inclined plane. An attack is like the ball rolling down it. It goes on gaining momentum and getting faster and faster on condition that you do not stop it.

If you check it artificially you lose your momentum and have to begin all over again."

Foch did not, however, anticipate early victory. In a letter to Clemenceau he prophesied: "The decisive year of the conflict will be 1919. In the spring of that year America will have reached the climax of her effort. If it is desired to shorten the war, we must wage it with the greatest possible intensity from this moment on. Consequently we must see that our Armies are given all the resources we can muster. The stronger we are, the sooner we shall be victorious and the more we shall be listened to"—the concluding remark shows Foch's growing political horizon and foreshadows his attempt to determine the conditions of peace.

Chapter XX

THE ROLLING BALL—OR THE EBBING TIDE

MARKED as the impetus given to Foch's spirit by the success on the Marne, the next "push" would not be the outcome of it, but of earlier origin. This fact is historically significant because of the decisive reverberation of that push.

As the counterstroke of July 18th had been planned as a part of Foch's long contemplated scheme of limited offensives, so was also the new stroke. On July 12th Foch had written to Haig, proposing a revival of a forestalled project: "The first offensive to be launched on the British front should be one starting from the line Festubert-Rebecq, with a view to freeing the Bruay mines and forbidding [the enemy's use of] the centre of communications at Estaires. . . ."

Five days later, on the eve of the Marne counterstroke, Haig had replied that he saw "no advantage in an advance over this flat and marshy region." He had suggested, instead, an offensive to disengage Amiens and the Amiens-Paris railway. "The best way to carry out this object is to make a combined Franco-British operation, the French attacking south of Moreuil and the British north of the Luce."

More significant still, he added: "To realise this project, I am preparing plans secretly for an offensive north of the Luce, direction east." Just as Foch had not told Haig of his Marne stroke until the eve of its delivery, so Haig had concealed his new Somme stroke from Foch until preparations were advanced. This unanimity in secrecy is rather curious. And Haig's project also was the result of a convergence of minds in which disclosure of thought was delayed.

On July 4th Monash's Australian Corps had carried out a brilliant little surprise coup with tanks at Hamel. Its success convinced not only the Australians of the value of this weapon, but also Rawlinson himself, originally a sceptic. Equally strong was the impression made on him by the evidence of the enemy's declining morale. Hence he conceived the outline of a greater coup. On July 18th he proposed it to Haig, and found that Haig had already made a similar proposal to Foch. As this fitted in with Foch's own long-cherished desire, he was prompt in approving it.

After the event, British complaints were made that its success would have been still greater if Haig had not been compelled by Foch, against his will, to let the French share in the operation. This co-operation was certainly a cause of complication, and Rawlinson had argued against it as inimical to the full surprise he sought. But it was Haig, not Foch, who overrode his desire. Foch, indeed, developed its prospects by amplifying its scope. If it would still have the defect of being a narrow frontal push, it would gain an extension of life by Foch's incorporation of it in a wider offensive frame.

The first hint of this development was given by Foch to Haig on July 20th: "It is essential to grip on to the enemy and to attack him everywhere that one can do so advantageously." He remarked that the enemy "seems to be reduced to having two armies," one for holding the line and the other for assault. "This situation presents a weakness which we can exploit by carrying out immediately several attacks along those parts of the front held by inferior troops." Weygand felt that the time had come to crystallise these directions into a definite form, and took advantage of his daily walks with Foch in the park at Bombon to press the point. Foch himself later recounted: "He was constantly urging me to put my opinions on paper. But I always replied, 'No, no, but you may do so if you wish.' The memorandum of July 24th was entirely his composition, but it reflects my views exactly."

The memorandum was a contrast in its logic and concreteness to anything that Foch had previously issued. It opened with the statement: "The fifth German offensive, halted at its very start,

was a failure. The offensive taken by the French Tenth and Sixth Armies has turned it into a defeat. This defeat must first of all be exploited on the field of battle itself . . . but the consequences go far beyond the battle itself." For the Allies it would form the base of a new development. The memorandum then surveyed the conditions of the campaign, pointing out that the balance of numbers was tilting to the Allied side, that they had already attained superiority in tanks and aircraft, and that the American reservoir was "pouring 250,000 men every month upon the soil of France." "In addition to all these indications that the factor of 'material force' is veering in our favour, there can be added the moral ascendancy . . . due to the enemy's inability to achieve the decisive result which was necessary for him"—the sequence is noteworthy, and very unlike the old Foch.

"The Allied armies . . . therefore have reached the turning point of the road. They have recovered in full tide of battle the initiative of operations; their numbers permit and the principles of war compel them to keep this initiative. *The moment has come to abandon the general defensive attitude forced upon us till now by numerical inferiority and to pass to the offensive.*" In other words, the mountain had come to Mahomet. During four years Foch had persevered with a theory of the offensive under conditions that made it futile. Now the enemy's offensive had made it fruitful. The conditions had at last come to fit Foch's theory—in this simple explanation would be epitomised the remaining months of the war.

But Foch did not choose to look far ahead. With hard experience he had become more of an opportunist and less of a theorist. His growing tendency to opportunism bears a curious resemblance to that of an earlier, if less academic prophet of the offensive—Ulysses S. Grant in the American Civil War. And in the hour of the great change in conditions his offensive horizon was as modest as it had formerly been ambitious.

"This offensive—while not seeking a decision—should consist of a series of movements to be undertaken immediately, and having for their objects results favourable to : (1) the further development of operations ; (2) the economic life of the country.

They will also serve to keep the fighting initiative on the side of the Allies. These movements should be executed with such rapidity as to inflict a succession of blows. This condition necessarily limits their extent. . . ."

The memorandum then gave a detailed programme of offensive actions :

"(1) Operations having as their objective the freeing of the railway lines that are indispensable for the later operations of the Allied Armies, viz. :

"(a) The freeing of the Paris-Avrincourt [on the Lorraine frontier] railway in the Marne region. This is the minimum result to be obtained from the offensive movement now in progress.

"(b) The freeing of the Paris-Amiens railway by a concerted action of the British and French Armies.

"(c) The clearing of the Paris-Avrincourt railway in the region round Commercy, by wiping out the St. Mihiel salient. This operation should be prepared without delay, and executed by the American Army as soon as it has the necessary resources.

"(2) Operations with a view to clearing the mining region in the North and to driving the enemy once and for all from the neighbourhood of Dunkirk and Calais. . . .

"As previously stated, these actions must succeed each other at brief intervals, so as to embarrass the enemy in the movement of his reserves and prevent him having sufficient time to fill up his units. The attacks must be provided with everything necessary to make their success certain. Finally and above all, surprise must be effected. Recent operations show that this is a condition indispensable to success."

The last sentence reveals a noteworthy recognition of an essential truth. After four years of war Foch had come to perceive a fact engraved throughout the previous four thousand years of recorded warfare. If his professional study of history had been wider his discovery must inevitably have been earlier. But better late than never.

There was more originality in the method here seen in bud, which would flower into that of rapid alternating blows at different points, each broken off as soon as its initial impetus waned, each so aimed as to pave the way for the next, and all close enough in time and space to react on each other. Thereby Ludendorff's power of switching reserves to threatened spots would be restricted, and his balance of reserves drained. If such a method had its seeds in history, its visible success under Foch's cultivation would form his positive contribution to the art of war. But as it was the product of trial and error, so this same process would continue to mark his application of it.

The memorandum then dealt with the future : " It is impossible to tell where the different operations outlined above will lead us, either in the matter of time or of space. Nevertheless, if the objects they have in view are attained before the season is too far advanced, there is reason for assuming now that an important offensive movement . . . will be launched toward the end of the summer or during the autumn." The memorandum concluded with a warning to watch for and be ready to frustrate enemy withdrawals " to shorter lines prepared in advance."

On July 24th Weygand read the memorandum to the Commanders-in-Chief when they met at Bombon. According to the account given in Foch's anecdotage, the proposals staggered them. " They took me for a madman." Haig's reply is said to have been : " The British Army, entirely disorganised by the events of March and April, is still far from being re-established." Pétain's : " The French Army, after four years of war and the severest trials, is at present worn out, bled white." Pershing's : " The American Army asks nothing better than to fight, but it has not yet been formed." Whereupon Foch said to them : " Take this plan. Study it carefully for forty-eight hours and tell me what you think."

But it is difficult to reconcile this version of Haig's attitude, at least, with the fact that he had already proposed and was preparing the operation that Foch's scheme allotted to him. And neither Haig nor Pershing waited until the time limit to signify their agreement. Pétain's dismay is more probable. For when he

sent his written agreement two days later, he expressed the opinion that the St. Mihiel attack, "in conjunction with operations to clear the Armentières pocket, should form the main offensive envisaged for the end of the summer and the autumn. It will probably exhaust French resources for 1918, but, in doing so, will accomplish useful and definite results." As one of these operations would fall within the British zone and the other within the American, it is difficult to see how they could appreciably diminish French resources, if it is clear that he wished to reduce the further French contribution to zero.

He was not alone in his desire. There is no reason to doubt Foch's story of how Fayolle, an old friend as well as subordinate, was in the habit of saying to him after each of the subsequent advances: "Ah, now I hope we shall have a breathing-space!" Whereupon Foch would dash his hopes with the answer: "You are greatly mistaken. We are not going to stop to breathe; we shall, on the contrary, push harder than ever and redouble our efforts." "But my men are dropping with fatigue. They have been fighting for months and simply cannot go on." "The Germans are dropping with still more fatigue. You can't imagine what a state they're in." And so Foch's order would go out for fresh attacks. But they would not always be interpreted in his spirit. Many of the French fighting troops and commanders had grown both weary and wary after four years of being constantly hurled against machine-gun defences. Thus Debeney, the commander of the First Army, immediately on the British right, gave a new word to the English language. "To deb" came to mean the practice of so timing your own push that your neighbour pushed first, and thus loosened the resistance that faced you.

With the turn of the tide many Frenchmen felt a desire to rest on their oars. This was allied with the feeling that it was for the British and, still more, the Americans to assume the burden of the offensive.

To combat this feeling would be one of Foch's heaviest tasks and responsibilities, and to rise above it himself, although a Frenchman, would be one of his greatest successes. Even Clemenceau began to share it once the scales had turned. If his

vigour did not slacken, it was diverted into a new channel—that of pushing the Americans forward. And as Foch was intent to push all the armies equally, Clemenceau's desire rubbed increasingly against Foch's. Foch was a soldier, Clemenceau a statesman. The one thought chiefly of ending the war ; the other, of the peace after the war. The more France expended her remaining capital, so lavishly spent during the first two years, the less force she might be able to exert across the council table. A strong army was as necessary to settle the peace as to settle the war. In the statesman's eyes Foch seemed to be forgetting his country's needs. The first rift between the two was seen almost immediately after the tide had turned. Hearing that Foch was preparing a fresh offensive for August 8th, of which he had not been informed, Clemenceau caustically remarked : " So you are attacking again ? With what ? You've got some troops left ? " Foch retorted : " You need not worry. I've all that I need. I can even say that things are not going too badly."

Foch was equally evasive when Lloyd George sent enquiries as to his strategic intentions. He drafted a vague note which merely said that the enemy front seemed to be " stretching," and that " as all is going well we will continue to act against the enemy." When it was hinted to him that his refusal of information might lead to difficulties, he retorted : " Not at all. If my plans succeed I shall hear no more about it, and, if they fail, the fact that Mr. Lloyd George knew of and approved them will not save me from being undone."

On July 28th Foch sent Haig a brief *directive* and a request to hasten the attack at Amiens so as to prevent the Germans recovering from the Marne stroke. He also told Haig that Debeney's army would be placed under his command. On August 4th Foch asked Pershing to prepare the offensive at St. Mihiel " before the end of the month."

On August 5th Foch made a significant enlargement in the Amiens plan whereby the attack would be extended southward by Humbert's army after Debeney's had pinched out Montdidier. The suggestion came from Fayolle, the Army Group Commander, but seems to have been inspired by Debeney—it promised him

an active neighbour on each flank. Humbert was less pleased, according to Foch's account : " Then I threw in Humbert ; I said to him : ' Go on.' ' But I've no resources ! ' ' Go on, all the same ! ' "

On August 6th Foch sent Diaz another impelling letter. Its chief interest is its evidence that Foch had as yet no vision of early victory. Speaking of the flow of American reinforcements, he remarked : " This rate of arrival is not such, however, that we can hope to end the war in 1918." The immediate need was to exploit the changing balance " by redoubled and repeated blows."

That same day Clemenceau suddenly appeared at Bombon in the afternoon, interrupting Foch while at work with Weygand. After sitting down, Clemenceau fished in his pocket, pulled out a folded paper, and remarked to Foch : " Here's a particularly interesting document that I've brought you, and that I've kept to read to you myself." It was addressed to the President of the Republic. The first sentence was sufficient clue to its purport : " The decree of 24th December, 1916, revived for the first time the dignity of Marshal of France. I have the honour to submit for your signature, in the name of the Government and, I can affirm, in the name of all France, a decree conferring on General Foch this high national recompense."

As Foch listened to the words, his eyes became moist, and when Clemenceau finished reading he rose and threw his arms round him in a fervent hug. What dreams were realised !

Yet there was another side to the medal, a practical side, revealed by the last sentence of the document : " The dignity of Marshal of France conferred on General Foch will not merely be reward for past services ; it will establish better still, in the future, the authority of the great soldier who is called to lead the armies of the Entente to final victory." Haig, as a field-marshal, or even Pershing as a full general, held a rank that was nominally superior to Foch's, for " general of division " was the highest grade in the French Army, even though its titular holder might be commanding an army or armies. Clemenceau, as we learn from Mordacq, suspected that this flavour of inferiority hindered the acceptance of Foch's instructions. " That is why

the Prime Minister asked the Government to appoint General Foch Marshal of France." In Clemenceau's rather naïve calculation the rank might give Foch additional leverage on the British and Americans. He would soon be disillusioned, first by Haig and then, more severely, by Pershing.

If Foch did not share such illusions, he regarded the honour as a reinforcement of his authority and an impetus to greater activity. He felt that the honour had a different and happier meaning than the previous time it had been awarded. Joffre was, obviously, in his thought when he said: "It is not a wreath of flowers on a grave. If it had been I should not have wanted it . . . we must strike harder than ever."

Meantime the final preparations had been made in front of Amiens. They formed a masterly mosaic of concealment and deception. All movements had been made at night, aeroplanes patrolled the area by day to check any exposure, and as more and more guns were slipped into concealed positions they registered without any apparent increase in the normal daily volume of fire. Under this cloak of secrecy Rawlinson's army was doubled, raising its strength to thirteen divisions. Along the fourteen-mile front of the attack the enemy had only six skeleton divisions. The main stroke south of the Somme was to be delivered by the Australian and Canadian Corps, the first already there, and as the presence of both these crack corps would be regarded by the enemy as the omen of a coming storm, a fragment of the Canadian was to let itself be seen and heard in Flanders, while the bulk was being smuggled down to the Somme.

An hour before sunrise four hundred and fifty tanks crawled forward, shrouded by a thick mist that made them seem to the bemused enemy like great saurian ghosts from a prehistoric era. Then, and only then, did the two thousand guns open fire, upheaving the shallow German trenches as if they had been smitten by an earthquake. The Australians and Canadians went forward in an irresistible surge, and armoured cars raced ahead to spread confusion and even to shoot up headquarter staffs at breakfast. Only north of the Somme, where tanks were few, was there a partial check. South of the river the day's final objective, six

to eight miles distant, was reached everywhere save on the extreme right, near the French. For want of tanks Debeney used a bombardment, and his assault did not begin until three-quarters of an hour after the British, and then only by his left-hand corps. Another joined in four hours later. Next morning his right wing advanced on either side of Montdidier, pinching it out. On the 10th Humbert's army was launched forward and penetrated nearly four miles.

By now Rawlinson's advance had lost its momentum, partly by contact with the rough surface of the 1916 battlefields, partly through lack of reserves, but, above all, by the passing of surprise. As in all frontal attacks, the further the defenders were pushed back the more their resistance was augmented by the snowball accumulation of reserves. It could be loosened by flank action, as the Germans had so often shown, but here this was restricted by the narrowness of the British break-through. And although Debeney's advance was sufficient to cover Rawlinson's flank, it was neither fast nor forceful enough to uncover the flank of Rawlinson's opponents.

If the Allies could not attain the speed and depth of the earlier German inroads, a rapid series of limited advances would suffice to expedite the ebbing tide and to accelerate the decline of the enemy's strength. But the exhilaration of success seems to have unbalanced Foch's judgment, and to have loosened his never too firm grasp of the limited method—of sudden springs carefully prepared, and stopping where the resistance stiffened. Instead, the cry "*Attaquez*" or "*Allez-y*" sprang too naturally to his lips. It is curious that he himself should have adopted the parrot as the symbol for one of his most celebrated parables: "See how it sets out, at the bottom of its ladder, to clamber up to its grain; it lays hold of the first rung and only lets go when it is sure of reaching the next. Thus it finally reaches the last rung and snatches the grain. I am this parrot." On Pétain's lips it would have been a perfect metaphor. But on Foch's it had a discordance with his actions. His cry was too parrot-like for his claws to be parrot-like. A truer metaphor would have been that of the indomitable hero who climbs the greasy pole.

On August 10th, when the offensive had virtually come to a standstill just short of the Roye-Chaulnes position, Foch sent Haig a *directive* "to push towards Ham"—as deep again as he had already gone. But Foch added a wish that Haig would "prepare as soon as possible an operation by the British Third Army in the general direction of Bapaume and Péronne in order to shake the enemy's line and immediately exploit any break." From the hopelessness of the first course and the helpfulness of the second would be evolved a further stage in Foch's offensive method.

Haig visited the front to see the situation for himself. It made him less responsive to Foch's forward urge, and he suspended the offensive on the 11th. That evening Foch went to see him again, but gained no more satisfaction than Haig's promise to reconnoitre the German position afresh.

On the 12th Foch issued a new *directive* which said: "It is important to obtain from the battle in progress the maximum result that it can yield and to exploit to the utmost the deep penetration made on the 8th, 9th, 10th August. . . ." He conceded that the offensive should concentrate against "the important points of the sector" instead of "pushing forward uniformly along the whole front." With this idea he gave instructions for a combined attack by Debeney and Rawlinson's right wing to "carry the network of roads around Roye," and another attack by Rawlinson's centre. Once more, an addition restored reality and opportunity to the *directive*: "These results can be immensely amplified by an extension of the attacks on the two flanks," by Byng's Third Army north of the Somme and by Mangin's army east of the Oise. "The results obtained by the French Third Army, unaided, show what can be expected from the extension of offensive actions on the flank of a victorious attack."

In the afternoon Foch met Haig and Pétain at Flixecourt, near Amiens, where they had been summoned for an audience with the King. Haig there expressed his agreement with Foch's *directive*, and the renewed offensive was fixed for the 16th.

But on the 14th, as Foch was on his way to Pétain's head-

quarters, he was overtaken by an air-borne letter from Haig. It said that the enemy's artillery fire had increased, that the Roye-Chaulnes position was solidly held, and that Haig had therefore decided to postpone the attack, which "might be made conjointly with the action on the front of the Third Army. . . ."

Foch at once replied that he saw no necessity for "subordinating the date" of Rawlinson's and Debeney's attacks to that of Byng. And on his return to Bombon, he sent a further and sharp remonstrance, declaring that Haig's action would compromise Debeney's army and "have the most serious consequences."

Next day Foch drove to his old abode at Sarcus, where he met Haig. There was a lively argument, in which Haig stubbornly held his ground, contending that the indirect method was more sure, and that Byng's advance would act as a lever to loosen the resistance south of the Somme. Haig gained his point, and Foch gave way. His concession was due, however, not merely to Haig's force of persuasion but to a cold douche of doubt from Debeney himself, received just before the interview with Haig.

By this yielding, economy of force was added to the advantage of Foch's new strategic method, which would now develop an ever-swelling expansion of blows to the acceleration of the enemy's reflux. After a preliminary move on the 17th, Mangin's new attack developed on the 20th. Next day Byng chimed in, and on the 23rd opened in full blast. Rawlinson and Debeney now tried to resume their advance, but the latter, especially, made small progress, and Foch thus came to realise that the resistance in the centre could only be loosened by leverage on the flanks. To extend this, Horne's First Army made a bound towards the northern end of the Hindenburg Line on August 26th, and on September 2nd the Canadian Corps broke the Drocourt-Quéant switch. Although the Germans rallied behind the strong barrier afforded by the Canal du Nord, this menacing advance induced Ludendorff to sanction a withdrawal to the old Hindenburg Line along the whole front, as far south as Soissons. An additional incentive to this withdrawal was given by Mangin's pressure at the other extremity. At the same time Ludendorff also shortened

and straightened his line by evacuating the greater part of the bulge made by his April offensive in Flanders.

Thus the sequel to the disengaging offensive of August 8th had far exceeded the modest objective which Foch had contemplated. The Germans had given up almost the whole of the territory gained from the British in their first two great offensives, and had left over 70,000 prisoners in British cages, while the French captures brought the total receipts from the three weeks' "tattoo" to nearly 100,000. Of all the ground gained by the German offensives the only substantial stretch still preserved was that between the Chemin-des-Dames and the Vesle. Elsewhere, their main line of resistance was now on their starting-line of March 21st, although the Allies were still kept at arm's length from it by strong outlying positions.

Still more significant, however, if yet unknown to Foch, was the moral effect on Ludendorff. This effect had sprung from the shock of August 8th alone, if accentuated by its sequel. To Ludendorff in reflection, "August 8th was the black day of the war. . . . It put the decline of our fighting power beyond doubt. . . . The war would have to be ended." His actions at the time fully endorse his reflection. He informed the Emperor and the Chancellor that peace negotiations ought to be opened before the situation became worse, as it must. The Kaiser agreed: "I see that we must strike the balance. We are at the end of our resources. The war must be ended." The strategic aim now became the negative one of producing a stalemate situation favourable to easy terms. At an Imperial Council held at Spa the conclusion was that "we can no longer hope to break the war-will of our enemies by military operations"; "the object of our strategy must be to paralyse the enemy's war-will gradually by a strategic defensive."

But the attainment of this limited object was handicapped by Ludendorff's inability to recover mentally from the shock of the surprise on August 8th. He failed to formulate any clear strategic plan to fulfil the new object. His irresolution combined with Rupprecht's resolution to imperil that object. For Rupprecht, as the Army Group Commander, had overruled the local

army commanders' wish to fall back at once behind the upper Somme, and had cemented the breach by hurrying all possible reinforcements to the spot. But thereby he had drained his reserves almost to bankruptcy, and in consequence would be unable to meet the next charge—on the Hindenburg Line. And this would soon develop.

The unexpected immensity of the sequel to August 8th brought a great change in Foch's outlook. On August 11th Wilson came to meet Foch at Sarcus, and recorded: "He has not yet mounted his Marshal's clothes, but will tomorrow when he sees the King. He very soon began about the 59-61 divisions [which Foch insisted that the British should maintain in France]. I told him that we could not keep up that number, and might drop to 40-43. He said he would resign, that England was prolonging the war by two years, that she had the men and would not use them, and so on. . . . I said he totally ignored our efforts in other theatres, our Navy, mercantile marine, industries, etc. . . . I told him that if he wanted more divisions all he had to do was to put his boys down to 18½ in, as we were doing, and then to turn the American divisions from 12 battalions of 1,000 men to 9 battalions of 900. He said he did not command the American Army, and I said, 'Nor do you the British.' It was nice and breezy while it lasted, but it did good, and we were as good friends as ever after it."

More historically significant is the continuation of this entry in Wilson's diary: "Du Cane* came to the train for lunch and told me Foch's plans for this year and next. Foch wants this year to disengage the lateral railways at Amiens and Hazebrouck, Compiègne, and St. Mihiel. Next year he wants to seize the Boche lateral railway of Lille-Hirson-Mézières-Metz; when that is done he thinks he can deal with the Boches, as it were, in two theatres—north and south." On the other hand: "Haig at dinner said we ought to hit the Boche now as hard as we can, then try to get peace this autumn."

If Foch did not until later conceive that the war might be ended that year, before the end of the month he came to envisage

* British representative with Marshal Foch.

a far wider development of his offensive campaign. The new plan affected the last of the original disengaging offensives that was still unfulfilled—the American operation to remove the St. Mihiel salient. The development of Foch's outlook first expanded and then contracted this operation, with fateful results on the course of the war.

The wonderful opening success of Haig's attack on August 8th had made Foch even more eager to hasten the operation on the St. Mihiel salient, a fang embedded sixteen miles deep in the French front. During four years it had galled France bodily and mentally. By its interruption of the railway from Paris to Nancy it was a check on any French offensive in Lorraine, while in 1916 it had been a serious choke on the defence of Verdun. Once the fang was extracted, new vitality would be given to offensive strategy.

On August 9th Foch besought Pershing and Pétain to accelerate the preparations, arranging that the scattered American divisions should be assembled and formed into an army in the area of its initial action, and that, to make up the American deficiency, the French should furnish most of the artillery. Two days later the staff of the First American Army moved to the area and there framed a plan more ambitious than that suggested at Bombon on July 24th. It was a telescopic plan, that could be extended, after pinching off the salient, to break through its baseline—the *Michel Stellung*, a still incomplete inner barrier against any sudden rupture of the front. It was, indeed, a frail protection for the most sensitive sector of front between Switzerland and the English Channel. A threat here need only penetrate a short distance before it would imperil the Germans' whole position in France. For it would cut the great lateral railroad at the end nearest Germany, and would turn the flank of all the successive lines to which the Germans could retire short of their own frontier. Further, such a threat had the vital economic promise of releasing the Briey iron region and menacing the Saar Basin—upon which the Germans largely depended for their munitions.

Force to fulfil these telescopic possibilities was provided by the American plan, which visualised the use of 15 double-sized

American divisions and 4 French divisions. Foch approved the plan on August 17th, and added to it not only 6 more French divisions, but an extension of the frontage and the direction "to strike the heaviest blow possible and secure the maximum results." In his *directive* he prescribed a line through Mars-le-Tour, close to Metz, as the objective.

But on August 30th a shadow fell across its path. Foch came to the American headquarters at Ligny-en-Barrois with a radically different plan. The change had its origin in Haig's intervention. August 8th and its sequel had given him a clear perception of the Germans' moral and material decline. Disregarding the cautious counsels of the British Government, he was now willing to stake his judgment and his position on an assault of the Hindenburg Line—the strongest artificial defences on the whole German front. But he was anxious to reduce the risk of failure and increase the profit of success; he therefore urged Foch in a letter of August 27th to change the main American attack from a divergent to a convergent direction. It would thus, he calculated, have a quicker and stronger reaction upon the German armies facing him, and by loosening their grip would ease his task—as he would similarly ease the Americans'.

Foch lent his ear the more readily to Haig's argument because it accorded with his own predisposition and the enlargement of his horizon. He had now begun to feel that the war might be finished in 1918 instead of 1919. And his enthusiastic assurance led him to transform his new method of alternating limited attacks at different points into a simultaneous general offensive: "*Tout le monde à la bataille !*" By it he seems to have hoped not merely to stretch and crack the German resistance, but even to cut off and surround the German armies between his converging pincers—British on one side and American on the other. Pétain, when consulted, was quite agreeable to the change of plan, which promised to draw the German reserves to either flank and leave the French a clearer path in the centre.

Thus when Foch came to see Pershing he proposed that the St. Mihiel plan should be modified to a mere excision of the salient. This operation was to be a preliminary to the American

main attack—now to be launched north-west towards Mézières instead of north-east towards Metz. Foch further proposed that while Pershing's army operated on the easier ground west of the Argonne, a Franco-American army under a French commander should attack the more difficult sector between the Argonne Forest and the Meuse. He also proposed to send General Degoutte to hold Pershing's hand and guide his tactical decisions.

The change of plan came as a shock to Pershing, and the other proposals as an affront. The interview was lively and the atmosphere grew heated. Foch hinted that he would appeal to President Wilson—and the threat had as little effect on Pershing as when previously used. Foch implied that Pershing was trying to shirk his share of the battle, and Pershing retorted that he was fully ready to fight "as an American Army." Foch caustically suggested that even for St. Mihiel Pershing could not raise an all-American Army, but had to depend on his allies for guns, tanks, and aircraft. Pershing retaliated with the reminder that by Allied request the Americans had shipped only infantry and machine-guns during the spring crisis. Foch then tried to assert his authority, declaring: "I must insist on the arrangement," whereupon Pershing delivered the forthright rejoinder: "Marshal Foch, you may insist all you please, but I decline absolutely to agree to your plan. While our army will fight wherever you may decide, it will not fight except as an independent American Army."

Foch wisely dropped the argument. Picking up his maps and papers, he turned towards the door. His pale and tired face revealed his emotional strain. But on the threshold he paused, handed Pershing a memorandum of his proposal, and, with his indomitable optimism, remarked that he thought Pershing would eventually arrive at the same conclusion as he had. Reflection, however, only confirmed Pershing in the opinion that Foch would give way. Next day Pershing sent a written reply. "I can no longer agree to any plan which involves a dispersion of our units." "Briefly, our officers and soldiers alike are, after one experience, no longer willing to be incorporated in other armies. . . . It is far more appropriate at the present moment

for the Allies temporarily to furnish the American Army with the services and auxiliaries it needs than for the Allies to expect further delay in the formation of the American Army."

He recognised the potential value of the convergent attack, but dwelt upon the difficulties of American participation. "Since our arrival in France our plans . . . have been based on the organisation of the American Army on the front St. Mihiel-Belfort. All our dépôts, hospitals, training areas and other installations are located with reference to this front, and a change of plans cannot be easily made."

Pershing did not attempt to hide his dislike of limiting the St. Mihiel attack, and suggested that instead of switching at once to the Meuse-Argonne he should exploit the St. Mihiel attack to the full, and later, if necessary, mount a fresh attack "either in the region of Belfort or Lunéville." Not yet vouchsafed an intuition of victory that autumn, he suggested that these attacks would fit in with the ultimate American aim of taking charge "during January and February" of "the sector from St. Mihiel to Switzerland." "However," he said, "it is your province to decide as to the strategy of operations, and I abide by your decision."

"Finally, however, there is one thing that must not be done, and that is to disperse the American forces among the Allied armies; the danger of destroying by such dispersion the fine morale of the American soldier is too great. If you decide to utilise the American forces in attacking in the direction of Mézières, I accept that decision, even though it complicates my supply system and the care of my sick and wounded, but I do insist that this American Army be employed as a whole. . . ."

The letter was carried to Bombon, where it became a bomb-shell. Foch realised that it was a new declaration of independence, and that American co-operation in his continued general offensive could only be obtained at the price of a concession. But Pershing's actually cost America more.

A fresh conference was arranged for September 2nd, whereat Pershing gave up his own plan for a share in Foch's and Foch conceded Pershing's claim to American unity. The concession

was wrung from him by his own realisation that without the Americans his right pincer would have a weak and worn point. But he left Pershing to choose whether he would operate west of the Argonne, where the ground would be easier, or east of it, where supply from the base would be simpler. And Pershing fatefully decided: "We'll fight east of the Argonne." Thus, although he had given up his own plan unwillingly, Pershing's was the ultimate responsibility for taking the stiffer of the two remaining courses.

Another decision made it still harder. Foch wanted the general offensive to open on September 20th if possible. Rather than delay it, he suggested that the St. Mihiel attack should be abandoned. Pershing was unwilling, and argued that he must pinch off the St. Mihiel wedge as a safeguard to his rear when attacking in the Meuse-Argonne. Again his claim was conceded. But it meant that he had not time to switch divisions from one battle-field to the other, and that he had to use raw divisions for the second, the greater and harder task.

Each attack interfered with the other, and the consequences were compound. The plan of cutting through the flanks of the St. Mihiel salient was replaced by a convergent stroke against the two faces. The force for the operation was cut down by more than half, and the left pincer was whittled down to a single division. Foch, indeed, suggested that it should be dropped altogether. This one-sidedness helped the Germans to slip out of the salient before they were cut off.

For weeks they had been meditating and preparing to forestall the attack by a retreat. And when the Americans advanced to the assault at 5 a.m. on September 12th, the Germans had actually begun the withdrawal during the night. The four-hour bombardment from three thousand guns, mostly French, was largely wasted on empty trenches. This fact has led to the satirical description as "the sector where the Americans relieved the Germans." If there is some truth in the description, it is not the whole truth. For although the German command was as well aware of the impending blow as most of the café-loungers of France, and were not deceived by the pretence of staging a battle

in Alsace, they hesitated too long over their decision. Thus they were caught in the act of retirement, and without the support of a large part of their artillery. And, with the attack following swiftly on their heels, their methodical arrangements suffered a dislocating jar.

Soon after midday the American right-hand corps under Liggett had reached its second day's objective! So did part of its neighbour. One brigade commander walked on unescorted to reconnoitre. Not a shot came, not a German was seen. It is said that he sent back a message to his superior: "Let me go ahead, and I'll be in Metz, and you'll be a field-marshal." But both Metz and the marshal's baton had to be foregone. Pershing felt himself tied by Foch's revised plan and refused all pleas for a further bound—which might have broken through the baseline. The limitation of aim had also led Pershing to restrict the free action of his pincers within their limited zone. The consequence was that all but some four thousand of the Germans in the salient slipped out before the right and left pincers closed next morning.

That day the two "pincer" corps moved up into line with Liggett's facing the Michel Stellung. There they stopped. Ant-like men in field-grey could be seen frantically digging, working on trenches which hitherto had only been marked out. The enemy commander, Fuchs, suffered a nerve-spasm—the danger of a break-through was "very great and continually threatening." When word came that "the enemy had not followed," it seemed too good to be true. Not until the 14th had he collected sufficient troops to fill the numerous gaps in the baseline. The eager Americans, held back for reasons few of them appreciated, had to watch the barricade being raised in front of their eyes. Their impatience was increased by the ease of their first trial run—by the time it came to a halt in front of the base-line they had taken over 15,000 prisoners at a cost of less than 8,000 casualties.

What would have happened if Foch had not changed his mind? If the American attack at St. Mihiel had been pursued to the full, as Pershing desired, could it have penetrated so fast and so far as to have decisive results, causing a collapse of the German

front? Pershing certainly thought that "an immediate continuation would have carried us well beyond" the Michel line "and possibly into Metz." Dickman, in charge of the right pincer, was still more emphatic: "The failure to push north from St. Mihiel with our overwhelming superiority of numbers will always be regarded by me as a strategical blunder for which Marshal Foch and his staff are responsible. It is a glaring example of the fallacy of the policy of limited objectives."

One may remark that St. Mihiel was, curiously, the one occasion when Foch strictly practised the limited method that he had been led to preach, the one occasion on which he checked the rolling ball and curbed his own desire to avoid checking it. Whereas he was usually the last to admit that the enemy's resistance had hardened, making further progress futile and effort wasteful, in this case he stopped the advance before resistance had even begun to harden. It was a reversion to his old theory that tactics should be subordinated to strategy. How ironical if he thereby forfeited the opportunity of a tactical break-through at the most vital strategic point!

In gauging the possibility, other opinions affect the balance. Liggett—a shrewd, cool reasoner—considered that it "existed only on the supposition that our army was a well-oiled, fully coordinated machine, which it was not as yet." The opposing Army Group Commander, Gallwitz, has also expressed doubt whether the Michel line could have been overrun without a freshly mounted attack on a large scale.

This argument applies, however, to the actual attack rather than to the wider original plan, which would have had two important factors in its favour. The first was numerical—that the bulk of the German reserves were massed in the far west, to dam Haig's advance. The second was geographical. Almost every attempted break-through in the war had been based on the idea of a single penetration. The simultaneous Artois and Champagne attacks of September 25th, 1915, had formed an exception, but they had been too far apart to cause such immediate strain on the sector between as might have led to its collapse. The convergent Argonne and Cambrai thrusts of Foch's new plan had

also an appearance of duality, but had an even wider interval between. In contrast, the acute salient at St. Mihiel offered ideal conditions for a dual penetration. If two powerful attacks had cut through the flanks of the salient its defenders would have dissolved into chaos—and have been “caged.” Through this collapsed centre a fresh force might then have driven, with a clear path between the protecting wings. On a reduced scale the actual attack fulfilled this process as far as it went, but the wings were held back, and there was no fresh force to pass through the centre. The incompleteness of the Michel Stellung and the time taken before it was adequately garrisoned suggest that on September 12th, or even the 13th, it could have been broken on a wide front.

It will always be a question how far the Americans could have advanced beyond the breach. Here the main brake would have been, not defences and defenders, but supplies. For decisive results the Americans would at least have had to reach the Longuyon–Thionville stretch of the lateral railway, over twenty miles beyond the Michel Stellung, and further still to interrupt the line running back from Longuyon through Luxembourg. The road blocks and transport difficulties actually experienced in the limited advance do not encourage an optimistic answer. Thus the American advance might have come to a halt before it reached the vital rail artery, and might not have reached it quick enough to cause a sudden collapse.

But it seems historically probable that an advance beyond the St. Mihiel salient would have brought more profit for less cost than the advance in the Meuse–Argonne. Who should know better than Gallwitz. His verdict is that “a successful attack launched against the Michel Stellung would have been more important than the successes gained along the Meuse and in the Argonne.” Further, “an American advance to Longuyon would have been a blow which we could not have borne.” The war that was to end on November 11th might thus have ended earlier—if Foch had not changed his plan. The irony of the changed direction was that the advance would not only fall short but would fail to help Haig.

Chapter XXI

“TOUT LE MONDE À LA BATAILLE ”

“**E**VERYONE is to attack (Belgians, British, French, and Americans) as soon as they can, as strong as they can, for as long as they can.” That was the simple message, conveying Foch’s intentions, which Du Cane brought to the British headquarters.

Such an assurance was the more welcome to Haig because on September 1st he had received a telegram from Wilson saying : “ Just a word of caution in regard to incurring heavy losses in attack on Hindenburg Line, as opposed to losses when driving the enemy back to that line. I do not mean that you have incurred such losses, but I know that the War Cabinet would become anxious if we received heavy punishment in attacking the Hindenburg Line without success.” Knowing that Wilson had earlier proposed his supersession, Haig read the telegram as a warning that he would be held responsible if the attack was a failure. It did not deter him from backing his belief and continuing his preparations to storm the Hindenburg Line. But he made the bitter comment : “ What a lot of weaklings we have in London at the present time, and how ignorant they are of the first principles of war ! ” Just as was his confidence this time, he forgot that it had not always been justified—as the Government at home could not forget. Milner anxiously went out to France on a ten days’ visit, and his impression is quoted in Wilson’s diary on September 23rd, almost the eve of the offensive : “ He thinks Haig ridiculously optimistic and is afraid that he may embark on another Passchendaele. He warned Haig that if he knocked his present army about there was no other to replace it. . . . The man-power is the trouble, and Douglas Haig and Foch . . . can’t understand it.”

This criticism seems to have been unjust. There is evidence that Haig now fully realised the danger of insolvency due to his drafts on the bank of man-power. But repayment would become due in 1919, and he felt that further expenditure now promised to avoid the need for repayment, whereas parsimony would give the Germans a chance to recover and prolong the struggle to 1919, when he might not have the resources to meet the demand.

His calculation was based not merely on the enemy's ebbing front and shrinking numbers, but on their moral decline. So was Foch's. Before framing his new offensive plan he had specially asked the Intelligence Service: "What's the moral state of those people?" The answer satisfied him.

Both he and Haig, who hoped "to be in Valenciennes in a few days," would find that they had still underestimated one material factor—the delaying power of even a thin chain of machine-guns. Happily for them this was offset by another material factor which Foch had underestimated—the naval blockade. If German morale was suffering under Foch's blows, it was suffering still more from, and was already undermined by, the now paralysing pressure of the blockade. As advance was slowing down, tired troops more readily lying down, and hopes dwindling in face of persistent machine-guns, revival would come by the loosening of the resistance from the rear. Letters from home, full of piteous tales of hunger and distress, would lie heavy on the empty stomach of the German soldier. The historic drama of the collapse of the Southern Confederacy and its determining cause would be re-enacted on a greater scale. But there would be one difference—a product of the difference between Lee and Ludendorff. For the German will to resist, though rotting internally, would still hold together until shattered by Ludendorff himself. The cracking of his nerve would cause the fatal spark which detonated the mine beneath the crumbling yet still unbroken fabric of Germany in arms.

The striking of the spark would coincide with the launching of Foch's great assault, yet this would not be the direct cause.

Foch defined the broad outline of his general offensive in a *directive* of September 3rd, the day after he had reached an agree-

ment with Pershing. “The British Armies, supported by the left of the French Armies,” were to “continue to attack in the general direction Cambrai-St. Quentin.” “The centre of the French Armies” was “to continue its actions to throw the enemy back across the Aisne and the Ailette.” The American Army, after carrying out its St. Mihiel operation, was to launch “an offensive in the general direction of Mézières, as strong and violent as possible, covered on the east by the Meuse and supported on its left by an attack of the [French] Fourth Army.”

Foch sought to give a further extension to his offensive by mounting an attack in Flanders. Following up a letter of September 2nd, he drove north on the 9th to see King Albert and obtain his agreement. Then, at a conference with Haig and the Belgian Chief of Staff, it was arranged that the first bound of the offensive should be to an arc-like line from Clercken Ridge on the left, along Passchendaele Ridge and past Gheluvelt to the Ypres-Comines Canal. From this line the offensive would fork, one branch pushing on north to Bruges in order to free the Belgian coast, while the main branch veered eastward. The double operation would be carried out by the twelve divisions of the Belgian Army and six of Plumer’s army, later reinforced by three French divisions. Command of the combined force was given to King Albert, but a French general would act as his Chief of Staff, and to this post Foch appointed Degoutte, whose “assistance” Pershing had so firmly refused.

Meantime, Rawlinson’s and Byng’s armies made a fresh attack on September 18th, which cleared the German advanced positions, captured a further 12,000 prisoners, and brought the British right wing within assaulting distance of the Hindenburg Line. As a personal contribution to the enemy’s distraction Foch spent the next few days in a well-advertised tour of the eastern extremity of the front, in Lorraine and the Vosges. It also gave him the opportunity to arrange preparatory steps for later attacks there.

On his return to Bombon, he finally settled the time programme of his general offensive : on the 26th the Meuse-Argonne attack would open ; next day the British First and Third Armies were

to strike at the northern end of the Hindenburg Line preparatory to the main blow by the Fourth Army two days later; on the 28th the Flanders offensive was to begin, and also an attack by the French centre towards Aisne—the last would actually be two days late.

The uneven distribution of the German forces had a vital bearing on the prospects of these several strokes. On the eve of the offensive there were 12 divisions facing the 18 Allied divisions available for the Flanders offensive. Far heavier was the German concentration along the Hindenburg Line facing the armies of Byng and Rawlinson. On this sector the Germans had 57 divisions to resist 40 British and 2 American divisions. In contrast, there were only 20 divisions facing the armies of Pershing and Gouraud, which comprised 31 French divisions and 15 large American divisions—a total equivalent to at least 60 normal-size Allied divisions. It should be noted that the German divisions had shrunk to an abnormally small size, so that even the British attack on the Hindenburg Line had a superiority of numbers over the enemy, despite an inferiority in number of divisions. And in the zone occupied by Pershing and Gouraud the three to one superiority in divisions meant at least six to one in riflemen.

Thus the numerical odds were greatly in favour of the success of Foch's right pincer as compared with his left. Because of this difference Foch was wise in advancing his right pincer before his left. But it might have been wiser to have allowed a longer interval between the two attacks, for that in the Meuse-Argonne could scarcely take effect in time to draw off the German reserves before the attack on the Hindenburg Line was launched. And, in fact, it did not.

While the massing of the enemy's reserves opposite the left pincer made the British task all the more difficult, it was, however, an advantage to Foch's strategic design. For the enemy's consequent weakness in the Meuse-Argonne sector increased the chance of the stroke that was more potentially dangerous. To reach the lateral railway the American attack had a considerably shorter distance to travel than the British from the Cambrai-

St. Quentin sector. And the Meuse end of that railway was the more vital because the nearest to Germany.

Foch's view was expressed in a note on the 25th: "The nature and importance of the operation undertaken for the 26th require that all its advantages be followed up without the slightest delay; that the breaking of the line of resistance be exploited uninterruptedly to as great a depth as possible. . . . This applies especially to the advance of the American Army. . . . As the strength of this army relieves it from all risks, it must, *without further instructions*, and upon the initiative of its commander, push its advance forward as far as possible. . . . Hence there must be no question of fixing limited objectives . . . not to be passed without fresh orders, as such restrictive instructions tend to prevent full exploitation of opportunities. . . ." Another indication of the special importance which Foch attached to this attack was that on the opening day he installed himself at a point close behind it, the Château de Trois-Fontaines north of St. Dizier.

Both in aim and in odds the Meuse-Argonne attack had a better prospect of decisive results than the Cambrai attack. And it is clear that Foch held this view. But the prospect became a mirage.

One drawback was inexperience. Others were less unavoidable. An excessive strain was put on a new organisation by the extreme haste of preparation. For the Americans had barely a week of real preparation on the spot, compared with the months which had preceded the French and British offensives of past years. Even the Germans had never mounted an attack so hurriedly. Yet in Pershing's plan the attacking troops were expected on the first day to reach and break through the rearward barrier formed by the Kriemhilde Line, a continuation of the Hindenburg Line. This would mean an advance of over eight miles. If so far-reaching a stride fulfilled the spirit of Foch's general instructions, Pershing's detailed instructions were less adapted to it—and less elastic. He certainly told his centre corps to push on to the Kriemhilde Line "without waiting for" its flanking neighbours. But these were told, in too indefinite words, that their advance was to be "based upon" the centre corps.

Pershing presumably calculated that his centre was likely to have an easier passage than his wings. The experience of all recent offensives was on his side. But this time the process, and degree of progress, would be reversed. The process had been true in cases of a real break-through, which here was not achieved.

The disadvantages of substituting the Meuse-Argonne for the St. Mihiel plan would early be felt. Haste of preparation was the first debit. A second was the compulsory use of raw divisions, the rawest of all being those placed in the centre. The toll was the higher because they had come to a region where nature handicapped inexperience. How different from the plain of the Woivre beyond St. Mihiel was the rough and wooded country of the Meuse-Argonne—a bad course over which to run a race against time. A third debit was the distance which separated the attackers from their main obstacle, the Kriemhilde Line. The handicap would be increased by the enemy's cunning.

At 5.30 a.m. on September 26th, after three hours' intense bombardment by 2,700 guns, nine American divisions advanced to the assault along a twenty-mile front. Six more were in corps and army reserve. It was a crushing weight to hurl on a line held by only five shrunken enemy divisions, averaging barely quarter the rifle strength of an American division. But crafty tactics helped to dam the flood and hold the danger at arm's length. The Germans had repeated the method of elastic defence—with the real resistance some miles in rear. The unexpectant Americans ran into this cunningly woven belt of fire when their momentum was lost—partly through the brake placed upon it by their own orders. Although the advance of the centre had come to an early stop on the slopes of Montfaucon, the wings had pressed on, only to be halted on reaching the corps objectives. It was difficult to revive this momentum after six hours' delay, and in face of the enemy's well-posted machine-guns little further progress was achieved. Although the centre came up level with the wings next day, the great offensive had practically spent its force.

That day Foch tried to apply a stimulant in the form of a note which said: "The use of numerous machine-guns can un-

doubtedly retard or cover the enemy's retreat. But they do not suffice to create a solid defensive system. And, at all events, small units properly manœuvring can get the better of any such methods. This being the situation, our attacks must constantly seek to break through. For this purpose attacking groups (infantry and artillery) should be formed for advancing against objectives the capture of which will break down the enemy's front. . . . Once more the issue turns upon the activity of commanders and the endurance of the troops; the latter is never found wanting whenever an appeal is made to it.”

But this appeal did not succeed in reviving the offensive, and on the third day six more German divisions began to arrive to cement the resistance. Many of the attacks were merely examples of vain gallantry, testifying once again to the folly of trying to overcome a “mowing machine-gun” defence by sheer weight of human bodies without the aid of surprise or adequate fire support. The 9,000 prisoners that had been taken were a small offset to the heavy cost, which was increased when, after re-organisation, a fresh general attack was launched on October 4th. If it made some progress on the left, it fell short of the Kriemhilde Line. The momentum of the French Fourth Army had been more sustained, but also more gradual, and it was still a step in rear of the American van.

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Foch, meantime, had dashed off to Flanders on September 29th to apply a spur to the offensive there. This had opened well on the 28th, and by the 29th the desired arc of high ground had been gained—an advance of some eight miles—and nearly 10,000 prisoners had been captured. But while the troops had pushed forward successfully through a sea of mud, their transport sank in it, and the offensive had to be suspended for a fortnight, until the roads in rear were made passable.

A greater result, however, had been achieved further south. The Hindenburg Line had been breached. In the misty dawn of the 27th, after a heavy night bombardment along the whole front, Byng's left and Horne's right assaulted the Canal du Nord.

Penetrating on a narrow sector, the assailants spread out fanwise, and thus exerted a leverage which broke down the sides of the breach. On the evening of the 28th they had reached the suburbs of Cambrai. While this advance only brought them level with Rawlinson's waiting line, it had brought them past the northern edge of the Hindenburg Line, and so formed a leverage on that line. Meantime, on Rawlinson's front 1,600 guns, one gun to every three yards, had been smothering the defences for fifty-six hours—the first eight hours with gas. Thus the defenders were driven to take refuge in their deepest shelters.

Rawlinson's assault on the 29th was to be launched on a nine-mile front, one British (the 46th) and two American divisions (the 27th and 30th) forming its spearhead, while the flanks were covered by two more British divisions. The prospect seemed more favourable to the American divisions, for whereas the 46th on the right was faced by the deep chasm of the St. Quentin Canal, along the American front this canal passed through a tunnel. But the prospect was marred by a mishap. On September 27th, the 27th American Division had made a preliminary attack to clear three enemy advanced posts, and reported success. Then a doubt arose, and uncertainty reigned whether the posts were occupied by American parties or were still in German hands. The ill-consequence was that, on the 29th, the artillery put down the barrage half a mile in front of the infantry starting line. And in this fatal interval lay the posts, still with their German garrisons, waiting to mow down the American infantry.

When the assault was launched, the men of the 27th Division fell in swaths. And the collapse in death of their advance reacted on that of the 30th Division in the centre. Nevertheless, its men reached and breached the forward edge of the Hindenburg Line. But in their ardour they pushed on, instead of waiting for the Australians to pass through, and were taken in rear by Germans who emerged from dug-outs and from the canal tunnel. Thus the effort of the Australians was spent in breaking down afresh this intervening obstruction, instead of in exploiting the original break-through.

But the day was redeemed by the success of the 46th Division.

Cloaked by the morning mist, its men had gained the canal and swarmed across it before the Germans realised the situation. Another division then leap-frogged them and carried the advance beyond the rear edge of the Hindenburg Line. The driving in of this deep wedge created a new leverage which helped the renewed Australian attack in widening the breach, and this leverage in turn was reinforced by pressure further north.

By October 5th the British had driven their way through the German defence system into open country, and had taken 36,000 prisoners. Mist and the method of leverage had been two of the chief factors in their success, which was also helped by the fact that the attack, in contrast to that in the Meuse-Argonne, had opened with the assailants close to the main barrier. The mist gave them the advantage of surprise in their assault on it.

Their success, however, had an ironical aspect. For they had broken the Hindenburg Line without any German divisions being drawn off by the Meuse-Argonne attack. Thus the result had justified Haig's confidence but not his precaution, proving that his troops could break through without indirect help to ease their path.

But the sequel proved a disappointment. The passing of the Hindenburg Line brought no marked acceleration of the advance, no sudden flooding of the open country beyond. Thirty miles still separated the British from Aulnoye junction at the western end of the lateral railway. Progress across this long stretch would be slow, if continuous. That progress, following on the breach of the Hindenburg Line, led the Germans to begin a general withdrawal of their line in the south near Reims, evacuating the nose of the great salient hitherto formed by their front in France. But the British progress was not sufficiently fast or dangerous to produce any general, or even local, collapse of the German front.

One cause was the wide area of reconquered and devastated country over which the British had now to haul their supplies. Another was that the British had largely spent their force in breaking the Hindenburg Line. And the strategic failure of the Meuse-Argonne attack deprived Foch of a counter-attraction

that might have drawn off enemy reserves from before his left wing, and have eased its path at this moment of opportunity.

Here he paid a fresh penalty for changing the direction of the American offensive. While it is certain that the Meuse-Argonne attack did nothing to help the British break-through or subsequent pursuit, it is almost certain that a continuation of the St. Mihiel attack would have helped greatly. If the Americans had broken through the Michel Line the menace to Metz and the lateral railway would have been so close and of such far-reaching danger that Ludendorff could not have ignored it. He would have been forced to call away some of the German divisions along the Hindenburg Line. Thereby the British would have used up less effort in the break-through, and have been able to follow it up quicker. And the German Armies would have had less time to prepare their withdrawal, which might have become a disorganised reflux.

This chance was forfeited by the actual plan which Foch had adopted. And the prospect had faded by the end of the first week of October.

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Redemption came unexpectedly. Unknown to Foch, his offensive had proved more deadly in anticipation than in fulfilment. Its potential menace had been a decisive reinforcement to the moral impression made by an indirect stroke in a far-distant quarter. There he reaped the benefit of a diversion, a straying from the narrow path of orthodox theory, which had disgusted his friend Wilson.

Ten days before Foch's grand offensive in France an event had occurred in the Balkans that, in the words of Ludendorff, "sealed the fate of the Quadruple Alliance." Ludendorff had hoped to hold fast in his strong lines in France, falling back gradually to fresh lines if necessary, and with his strategic flanks covered, while the German Government was negotiating a favourable peace. But on September 15th the Allied army in Salonika attacked the Bulgarian front. Franchet d'Esperey had concentrated a Franco-Serb striking force, under Michich, on the

Sokol-Dobropolye sector, where the Bulgarians, trusting to the strength of the mountains, had weakened their armed strength. While the British on the Doiran sector pinned a large part of the enemy reserves, Michich broke through and drove on towards Uskub. With their army split in two, the Bulgarians, already tired of the war, sought an armistice. Signed on September 29th, it not only severed the first root of the Quadruple Alliance, but opened the way to an advance on Austria's rear.

That same morning Rawlinson's blow fell on the Hindenburg Line. The early news was so disquieting as to offset the momentarily reassuring news from the Meuse-Argonne. In the afternoon Ludendorff, at Spa, studied the problem in his room at the Hotel Britannique—an ominously named choice of headquarters! Examination only seemed to make it more insoluble, and in a rising outburst of fear and passion he bemoaned his troubles and berated all those whom he regarded as having thwarted his efforts—the jealous staffs, the defeatist Reichstag, the too humanitarian Kaiser, and the submarine-obsessed Navy. Gradually he worked himself into a frenzy, until suddenly, with foam on his lips, he fell to the floor in a fit. And that evening it was a physically as well as morally shaken man who took the precipitate decision to appeal for an armistice, saying that the collapse of the Bulgarian front had upset all his dispositions: “troops destined for the Western Front had had to be dispatched there.” This had “fundamentally changed the situation in view of the attacks then being launched on the Western Front,” for although these “had so far been beaten off, their continuance must be counted on.” Ludendorff had lost his nerve—only for a matter of days, but that was sufficient, and recovery too late.

Whatever faults may be found in Foch's judgment, it is certain that he would never have suffered a similar lapse. Even if his armies had melted in his hands, his will would still have been intact so long as he had life in his body.

At this crisis Prince Max of Baden was summoned to be Chancellor, and to use his pacific reputation as a pledge of honour in negotiating peace. To bargain effectively and without open confession of defeat he asked and needed a breathing space of

"ten, eight, even four days before I have to appeal to the enemy." But Hindenburg merely reiterated that "the gravity of the military situation admits of no delay," and insisted that "a peace offer to our enemies be issued at once," while Ludendorff plaintively chanted the refrain, "I want to save my army."

Hence on October 3rd the appeal for an immediate armistice went out to President Wilson. It was a confession to the world—and to the German people themselves—of defeat. Men who had so long been kept in the dark were blinded by the sudden light. All the forces of discord and defeatism received an immense impulse.

Within a few days the German command became more cheerful, even optimistic, when it saw that the breach of the Hindenburg Line had not been followed by a break in the human fighting line. More encouragement came from reports of a slackening in the Allied pressure. Ludendorff still wanted an armistice, but only to rest his troops as a prelude to further resistance and to ensure a secure withdrawal to a shortened defensive line on the frontier. By October 17th he even felt he could ensure this without a rest. But his first impression, and depression, had now spread throughout Germany as the ripples spread when a pebble has been dropped in a pool. Foch's old parable had a new meaning.

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The German appeal of October 3rd was a tonic to Foch. He needed it. For although his faith never faltered, the month of October was a time of trial and strain—trial in front and strain from the rear. In striving to revive his own military pressure on the Germans, he suffered from both resistance and pressure in conference. And the former he found the less uncomfortable of the two.

On October 1st Foch, on return to Bombon from his visit to Flanders, had discussed with Pétain how to give a new impetus to the Meuse-Argonne attack. Foch considered that Pershing's remedy of pushing in more divisions "only intensified the difficulties, and resulted in a complete blocking of his rear and the

bottling up of his communications." He arranged with Pétain to extend the attack to the east bank of the Meuse, and to withdraw part of the American divisions in "the narrow corridor between the Meuse and the Argonne," distributing them east of the Meuse and west of the Argonne. To save time, if also to extend French control, they would be incorporated in French army corps. Further, while Pershing's sphere of command would be side-slipped eastward astride the Meuse, a new French army commander would assume charge of the Franco-American forces on either side of the Argonne Forest. It was an apt design, and sound from a purely strategic point of view.

But when Weygand carried it to Pershing he abruptly rejected it, seeing it as a fresh political manoeuvre to curb American independence. He was willing to extend the attack east of the Meuse—under his own command. Foch once more gave way, merely making the stipulation that "the American attacks should be resumed, and, once started, continued without pause. . . ."

He did not hide his disappointment with the Meuse-Argonne offensive and its results: "inferior to what was permissible to expect against an adversary assailed everywhere and resisting at certain points with only worn-out, heterogeneous and hastily assembled troops, and in a region where his defensive positions had already been captured." He complained that those in command did not seem "to push it personally with full energy, themselves supervising the execution of their orders." It was easier for him to apply a spur to the French, and he asked Pétain to give his army commanders the keynote: "Inspire, give a lead, be watchful, supervise!" Gouraud was instructed to "march straight on the Aisne in the direction of Rethel"; Berthelot to push towards the Aisne north of Reims in order to aid Mangin's movement on Laon. But the Germans had already begun to withdraw on this front, and the French centre did little to hasten their retirement, almost the only "kick" having been a small one north-west of Reims by Berthelot on September 30th. This yielded 2,000 prisoners. The French centre did not again make serious contact with the enemy until on October 15th it

found the enemy in position on a flattened line through Rethel to La Fère. With perhaps too acute strategic sense the French commanders appreciated that decisive results depended on the rapid advance of the pincers on either flank, and so were content to threaten the enemy's centre by their pressure without unduly expediting his retreat. This restraint certainly lightened the strain on their own men, weary from four years of war, but it also reduced the strain which the enemy, engaged in holding back the pincers, had to bear. A more uniform pressure would have better suited Foch's taste. For in him there was at least one unwearied Frenchman.

His relations with the British were now his lightest strain. This was natural, for their recent achievement fitted his mood; and when their advance lost momentum he felt that comparison prevented any complaint. His chief anxiety over the British was that they should keep up their man-power. Wilson met him the day after the breach of the Hindenburg Line. "He is looking very well and, of course, mightily pleased with everything. He insisted again upon our keeping up sixty-one divisions, building less ships, less aeroplanes, less tanks, etc. The same story." And at a conference at Versailles on October 7th Foch protested against any reduction in the number of divisions. Wilson's diary has the caustic note: "Nothing, of course, settled. Lloyd George asked for Foch's photograph, so all went well." Although now hoping for victory in 1918, Foch was still thinking of a 1919 campaign. He considered that the British Government was "inclined to give aviation and tanks a perhaps exaggerated importance."

It is interesting to note this continued faith in man-power as compared with machine-power, the more curious because he owed the great successes of July 18th and August 8th largely to the tanks, and the failure of September partly to an inadequacy of tanks—as Pershing's report was to point out. Again it was to the ceaseless air offensive on the German rest billets and on the munition centres in the Rhineland that Foch in part owed the diminution of the enemy's ammunition supply and the accelerated decline of German morale, both at the front and at

home. But not until after the war did Foch reveal a new appreciation of the potency of air attack.

In contrast, the collapse of Bulgaria had enlarged Foch's strategic horizon, bringing him to realise more fully the value of the indirect approach. He was eager that the Bulgarian success should be developed by an advance up the Danube against Austria's rear, in conjunction with the Rumanians. He urged Wilson to reinforce the Salonika army, and to instruct its commander, Milne, to join in the Danube advance. Wilson, however, as well as Lloyd George, held that an attempt should first be made to knock out Turkey and open the Dardanelles.

This possibility had just been enhanced by Allenby's great coup in Palestine, delivered on September 19th, which had not merely defeated, but rounded up the Turkish Army. Foch delightedly declared that this was “*très chic*,” but he was “entirely opposed” to any detachments from the Salonika army to exploit the success by a move on Constantinople. He favoured the idea of “isolating” Turkey, by occupying strategic points in Bulgaria, so as to cover the rear of the advance up the Danube. He gave way a little when the importance of controlling the Black Sea and the entrance to the Danube was pointed out to him, and refrained from further opposition, contenting himself with the private comment that the “expedition against Constantinople had every chance of ending in failure,” and that Milne was likely to take “a hard knock.” In the outcome Milne was given the mission of moving on Constantinople, while Franchet d'Esperey advanced up the Danube.

Foch's divergence of opinion from Clemenceau on this point was symptomatic. A greater discord was developing over the question of the American offensive in France. Clemenceau had visited Foch and bitterly remarked: “Those Americans will lose us our chance of a big victory before winter. They are all tangled up with themselves.” Clemenceau complained that Foch did not “know how to enforce his will,” and showed increasing impatience. “You will have to answer to France for it.”

Foch, much goaded, took the counter-offensive against Clemenceau with the remark: “You realise that, constitu-

tionally, I am not under your orders." Clemenceau acidly replied : "I have much good will for you, but, if I have any advice to give you, it is not to try that game." Foch's claim to independence was no more fortunate than his attempt in the spring to overrule Haig's claim to independence of himself. It gave Clemenceau the impression that Foch was suffering from "swelled head," "blinded by the smoke of incense," and that he was an undisciplined soldier ready to sacrifice his duty to the pursuit of his personal advantage. Worse still, Clemenceau acquired a fixed idea that Foch was a second Boulanger, threatening the civil power. He might, more aptly, have remarked that Foch had just reached his sixty-seventh birthday.

With every day's apparent delay on the Meuse-Argonne front, Clemenceau's resentment grew. At last, on the 11th, he decided to abandon his "persuasive manner"—as he termed it ! He went to the Elysée to show the President the draft of a letter he proposed to send Foch "in order to bring about a decision concerning the inaction of the American troops." After reading the letter, Poincaré formally advised Clemenceau not to send it : "If that letter is sent its contents will become known to the Marshal's *entourage*, and without a doubt to Pershing's also. It may cause serious friction. In any case, I think that some of the phrases ought to be toned down."

Clemenceau yielded so far as to modify the language of the letter, and then sent it back next day to Poincaré. But the President considered that it was "still too harsh with regard both to the Americans and to Foch," and that it might "provoke the Marshal's resignation." Clemenceau, for example, had said : "It is our country's command that you shall command." Poincaré remarked : "If that was said to me I should resign." He added : "Is it Monsieur Clemenceau's business to concern himself with what Marshal Foch does as Commander-in-Chief of the American Army ? In that capacity is not Marshal Foch responsible rather to the American Government ?" The letter concluded with a plea for patience, saying : "If at the end of a few weeks things are unchanged we could then have resource to extreme measures, but as there is a possibility that with rather

thin-skinned foreigners such measures might spoil everything, we must, in my opinion, have recourse to them only if the situation became really desperate."

On October 14th Clemenceau came back from a visit to the front, and when told of this letter by the Under-Secretary of State he was so furious at the rebuke that he refused to read the letter, jumping to the conclusion that Poincaré and Foch were in league against him. But he at least postponed the despatch of the letter. He seems to have been a little soothed by a verbal message from Foch saying that he had "just been to see Pershing and had demanded *results*."

But after a week had passed Clemenceau felt that he had waited long enough for these promised results. And he had two new causes for irritation. The first was that Foch had forbidden Pétain to send him a report on the American Army which concluded with the verdict: "If General Pershing perseveres in his present line of conduct, it can only end in disaster." The second arose out of a request which Haig had made for two new American divisions to reinforce his advances. Finding that Foch hesitated to tackle Pershing and daily put him off with excuses, Haig appealed to Clemenceau, who sent Mordacq to urge the matter with Foch. Foch merely replied that "he was going to study the question but saw certain difficulties in its solution." So on the 21st Clemenceau launched his letter.

"I have postponed from day to day writing you about the crisis existing in the American Army. . . . You have watched at close quarters the development of General Pershing's exactions. Unfortunately, thanks to his invincible obstinacy, he has won out against you as well as against your immediate subordinates. To go over all this again can only lead to useless regrets. . . . What matters is the immense battle now going on, a battle which you have conducted in such a way as to place you in the front rank of great captains. . . . Constitutionally, I am the head of the French Army. . . . I would be a criminal if I allowed the French Army to wear itself out indefinitely in battle, without doing everything in my power to ensure that an Allied Army which has hurried to its aid was rendered capable of fulfilling the military rôle for which it is destined.

"The French Army and the British Army, without a moment's

respite, have been daily fighting, for the last three months, battles which are using them up at a time when it is impossible for us to reinforce them immediately with fresh effectives. These two armies are pressing back the enemy with an ardour that excites world-wide admiration ; but our worthy American Allies, who thirst to get into action and who are unanimously acknowledged to be great soldiers, have been marking time ever since their forward jump on the first day. . . . Nobody can maintain that these fine troops are unusable ; they are merely unused.

"One does not have to be a technician to understand that the immobility of your right wing cannot possibly be part of your plan. . . . I am aware of all the efforts you have made to overcome the resistance of General Pershing ; indeed, it is because you have omitted nothing in the way of persuasion that I cannot shirk the duty of asking myself whether . . . the time has not come for changing methods. . . . If General Pershing finally resigns himself to obedience, if he accepts the advice of the capable generals whose presence at his side he has hitherto permitted only that he might reject their counsels, I shall be wholly delighted. But if this new attempt to reconcile two contrary points of view should not bring the advantageous results you anticipate, I must say to you that, in my opinion, any further hesitation should be out of the question. For it would then be certainly high time to tell President Wilson the truth, and the whole truth, concerning the state of the American troops. . . ."

Foch abstained from any direct discussion of this point. "For," he said later, "what is the good of giving orders, when for many moral and concrete reasons they cannot be executed? We have to treat men, and especially men of a different nation, according to what they are, and not according to what we should like them to be. I therefore continued my method of patience and persuasion, as opposed to severity and restraint." "The letter of M. Clemenceau, pressing as it was, did not make me vary my course by a hair's-breadth. I took absolutely no notice of it whatever."

Foch considered that an appeal to Wilson for Pershing's recall might not succeed, and if it did not, Pershing "would know what had occurred and be still more restive. Even assuming that he was recalled, his successor would need a long time to gather up the threads."

Foch therefore sent Clemenceau a bare and businesslike reply, beginning with a table which showed that of the 30 American divisions “fit for battle” 8 were with the French, 2 with the British, and 20 “under Pershing’s orders, constituting the self-contained American Army. I count upon maintaining these categories. . . . I also contemplate varying the proportion between the two according to circumstances, increasing the ten and diminishing the twenty, whenever operations being prepared permit it. It is by manipulation of this sort that I expect to diminish the weaknesses of the High Command, rather than by orders.” He concluded by pointing out that the “crisis is the sort from which all improvised armies suffer,” and by dwelling on the “magnitude” of the American effort. “From September 26th to October 20th its losses in battle were 54,158 men—in exchange for small gains on a narrow front, it is true, but over particularly difficult country and in the face of serious resistance.”

Foch’s explanation as to his proposed method is characteristic and significant. But it is a question whether consistent candour might not have been more profitable, in view of Pershing’s well-founded suspicion that this “manipulation” was being practised. Constant suspicion of the motive underlying all proposals led to their consistent obstruction.

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On October 7th the offensive had been extended east of the Meuse, but after a short advance the French corps that delivered it met a line of defence which completely stopped it. That same day Pershing’s left drove in a new wedge which persuaded the enemy to release their hold on the northern border of the Argonne Forest. This and other small gains encouraged Pershing to launch a new general offensive on the 14th. But although it gained a footing on the Kriemhilde heights it failed to break through. Pershing now realised that the offensive had reached stalemate, and made a lengthy halt while he reorganised his army, replenished its supplies, and improved its communications. He also transferred to Liggett the First American Army west of

the Meuse, and formed the inactive forces east of the Meuse into a Second Army under Bullard. One advantage of this change was, in Pershing's view, that it gave him the status of an Army Group Commander ; and he promptly demanded that he should receive instructions direct from Foch instead of through Pétain. This was conceded ; indeed, Pétain had already suggested it as a possible easement to friction.

On October 21st Foch issued a *directive* for the renewed offensive, which would be helped by the fact that Gouraud's Fourth Army, following up the German withdrawal, was now for the first time ahead of Pershing's, thus exerting a leverage on the flank of the latter's opponents. Foch insisted that the offensive should be ready without fail by November 1st. "The general aim . . . is to reach the region of Buzancy (for the American First Army), Le Chesne for the French Fourth Army, in order to liberate the line of the Aisne from the east." As Buzancy had been intended in the original plan to be reached during the night of September 27th, this was a very modest aim.

This limited aim, coupled with the fact that on October 18th he had moved his own headquarters from Bombon to Senlis, seems to show that Foch now pinned his hopes to the advance of his western pincer. Indeed, ten days earlier he had written that, of his three offensives, "the one most advantageous to exploit—thanks to the success obtained by the British armies—is that of Solesmes-Wassigny" (*i.e.*, towards Maubeuge). He directed that the British should swing in a north-easterly direction, and to help their push he pressed Degoutte to resume the offensive in Flanders, reinforcing this with two American and two more French divisions.

On October 14th the attack was launched and the enemy gave way rapidly, evacuating the Belgian coast and swinging back their right to a line covering Ghent. On their left, too, they were compelled to give up Lille, which was occupied by the British on the 17th. That same day Haig's attack at Le Cateau forced the passage of the Selle and thereby made a breach in the third and last of the withdrawal positions which Ludendorff had originally prepared. To the eastwards this position ran along

the southern edge of the Ardennes, covering Mézières and Sedan, so that Foch's right pincer was still a long way from it.

The hopes based on the fresh thrust of his left pincer soon faded, however, and although another 21,000 prisoners had been taken, its advance became too gradual for decisive effect. If German machine-gun rearguards imposed a brake, an even stronger brake was applied by the destruction of roads and railways, which made it impossible for supplies and ammunition to reach the advancing troops. There was more faith than immediate hope in Foch's *directive* of October 19th, which said that “the Flanders Group of Armies will march in the general direction of Brussels. . . . The British armies will advance south of the line Pecq-Lessines-Hal, their right marching . . . upon Agimont, north of Givet. The mission of the British armies continues to be to throw the enemy back upon the almost impenetrable *massif* of the Ardennes at the point where this obstacle cuts his main lateral railway.” This description exaggerated the impassibility of the Ardennes, which were traversed by numerous roads and several railways. To close the flanking routes would complicate the German withdrawal, but only if they were closed very rapidly—as always in war, everything turned on the time factor. And the lateral railway was shrinking in importance with every day's progress in the German withdrawal. Foch's converging pincers would lose their point when no salient was left to pinch.

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His own mind, indeed, was now turning to an alternative, or, at least, a variant. On October 9th a note from Pétain's Intelligence branch had pointed out that 150 out of the 187 German divisions were placed between the Meuse and the sea. The enemy “can only change this proportion very slowly (by railway, a division a day). He will thus be in a very difficult situation . . . if faced with a French attack in Lorraine.”

But not until the 20th did Foch definitely react to this suggestion by instructions to Pétain which said: “The operations now under way are intended to throw the enemy back on the Meuse. . . . To overcome his resistance on this river, by turn-

ing the position, attacks should be prepared west and east of the Moselle, moving in the general direction of Longwy-Luxembourg on one side, and of the Sarre on the other. The chance of a rapid success of these attacks will be in proportion to the promptness with which they are made. . . . Their chances are also increased by the fact that the enemy will soon be deprived of his principal lateral railway from Mézières to Sedan. Therefore it would be well to utilise French troops released by the shortening of our line. . . ."

Pétain submitted his proposals the next day. To Foch they seemed to have the "drawback of making a sufficiently rapid execution difficult," especially in the sector between the Meuse and Moselle. Hence Foch decided to postpone the attack towards Luxembourg, and asked Pétain to prepare the other, a thrust from the Nancy sector across the German frontier towards Sarrebruck. Thus Foch at the close of the war was planning to repeat, under more favourable circumstances, the thrust with which he had begun the war. . . . When first delivered, it had been too early. It would now be too late.

Foch left Senlis for Flanders on the 21st, and it was not until the 25th that Pétain was able to discuss the plan with him. Pétain reported that the attack could be ready about November 15th, and explained from what sources he expected to draw the troops required. In addition to Gérard's army, at present holding the sector, Mangin's army would be transferred from the French centre and inserted between Gérard and the Second American Army. On the 27th Pétain issued instructions to Castelnau, the Army Group Commander. He decided that the larger proportion of the strength available should be given to Mangin, so that he might have the means not only to cover his flank towards Metz but also to exploit success along the more promising line. Pétain had also asked for ten or twelve American divisions, but Foch shrank from such a demand, fearing Pershing's opposition. He told Pétain: "There is an obvious interest in beginning the Lorraine offensive as soon as possible, as the size of the force is less important than the moment chosen for action."

Quickness, however, was sacrificed. If the cause lay partly in

Foch's prolonged pursuit of his original direction, it was not the only cause. Each headquarters concerned drew up lengthy and detailed schemes, then debated them and wrote fresh ones. These delays may have been due to the grip of trench-warfare habit—but may also have been due to a reluctance to move without the assurance of American help. And it was not until November 6th, when the renewed American offensive west of the Meuse had fulfilled its purpose, that Foch put his request to Pershing—for six divisions. Even then he met such reluctance that, a few days later, he was fain to write Pershing: “I will give orders to have them early replaced under American command. It is a case before everything else of moving quickly. That is why I again insist.” Pershing then conceded Foch's demand, but on the condition that the divisions should be under Bullard's command. They began to move on the morning of November 11th.

Thus, at the last hour of the war, a force of 22 French and 6 American divisions, supported by a large mass of artillery and 600 tanks, was assembling—for an hour that would never strike. While the enemy's capitulation was the event that forestalled it, its promise was also partly forestalled by allowing the enemy time to complete his great withdrawal west of the Meuse and to prepare the evacuation of Metz. If the stroke had been ready at the end of October, as was practicable, it would certainly have caused the enemy more injury than those that were actually renewed at that time. For there was then little point in a continuation of the general convergence on Mézières.

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On November 1st, however, Liggett launched the renewed American blow in the Meuse-Argonne, driving a deep wedge through the Germans' newly improvised defences, and using this as leverage, in conjunction with Gouraud, to loosen the enemy's resistance along his whole front. After a vain effort to check his progress, the Germans fell back to the Meuse, pivoting on their left and covered by rearguards. The attack in Flanders had been resumed on October 31st, but, after forcing the enemy back to Ghent, was brought to a halt along the line of the Scheldt.

Thereupon Foch decided that the obstacle could best be overcome by turning it from the south. Accordingly, Haig renewed his attack on November 4th, forcing the Sambre and Oise Canal.* Next day the Germans began a fresh and far-reaching withdrawal along the whole front between Condé and Rethel, giving up Aulnoye junction and Maubeuge. But they were falling back faster than they could be followed. A pause must come while the communications across the devastated area were being repaired, and thus the Germans would have breathing space to rally their resistance. The Franco-British advance was to reach the line Sedan-Mézières-Mons by November 11th—the line of the opening clash in 1914—but strategically it had come to a standstill.

The Germans' more susceptible front was now north of Verdun. On November 7th the Americans reached the Meuse near Sedan, attaining their long-sought goal of cutting the lateral railway. For four years that railway had been the Germans' lifeline. But when it was cut it had ceased to be their lifeline. The real menace to them was not in this direction or in this achievement. It lay in the fact that Liggett had begun a wheel to the east, towards Longuyon. In conjunction with Bullard he was preparing to attack the strong position, between the Meuse and the Chiers, to which the enemy had withdrawn. If this was lost it would be impossible to hold the Antwerp-Meuse line, and the Rhine would have to be the next line of resistance. Hence the German command was specially sensitive to the threat.

* The material effect exerted by Foch's right and left pincers respectively can be gauged from the captures. Between September 26th and November 11th the American offensive in the Meuse-Argonne (right pincer) took 26,000 prisoners and 847 guns; the British offensive towards Maubeuge (left pincer) took 88,500 prisoners and 1,540 guns. This figure excludes the Flanders offensive.

Over the whole period of the Allied offensive campaign from July 18th to November 11th the captures were :

British Army	..	188,700 prisoners	2,840 guns
French Army	..	139,000 "	1,880 "
American Army	..	48,800 "	1,424 "
Belgian Army	..	14,500 "	474 "

But there were now new and worse dangers developing elsewhere. Germany had lost her remaining partners. Defenceless Turkey, menaced by Milne's advance on Constantinople, had capitulated on October 30th. That same day the Austrians besought an armistice. Three days earlier the Italians had launched their long-promised offensive, after the crossings of the Piave had been forced, and the Austrian Army was split asunder, collapsing in rout. These disasters had a prompt reaction on Germany.

Already, on October 23rd, President Wilson had replied to the German appeal with a note that virtually required an unconditional surrender. Ludendorff had wished to carry on the struggle in the hope that a successful defence of the frontier might damp the Allies' determination. But the situation had passed beyond his control, the nation's will-power was broken, and his advice was in discredit. On the 26th he had been forced to resign.

Then, for thirty-six hours, the Chancellor lay in coma from an overdose of sleeping-draught after influenza. When he returned to his desk on November 3rd, not only Turkey but Austria also had capitulated. If the situation on the Western Front was felt to be rather easier, Austrian territory and railways were now available as a base of operations against Germany's back door. Next day revolution broke out, and spread swiftly over the country, fanned by the Kaiser's reluctance to abdicate. The German Fleet mutinied when their commanders sought to send them out on a forlorn attack on the British Navy. But in these last days of terrible and diverse strain the reddening glare in Germany was accentuated by the looming clouds over the Lorraine and Austrian frontiers. On November 6th the German delegates left Berlin to treat for an armistice.

The news was a fresh spur to Foch in spurring on his subordinates, in order that unremitting pressure along the front might reinforce the leverage on the German Government's will. Pétain responded by antedating the Lorraine offensive by one day—to the 14th. It is unlikely that this would have proved an

exception to the "wave theory," and have solved the hitherto insoluble problem of maintaining the initial momentum of advance after a break-through.

Foch did not think so. According to his *Memoirs*, he expected merely the "rapid conquest of a dozen or so miles. After this it would undoubtedly encounter devastations such as were already retarding elsewhere the progress of the other armies." "It would add its impulse to theirs, amplify them, reinforce their effect, without changing their nature."

It is certain that when asked (on October 29th) how long it would take to drive the Germans back across the Rhine, if they refused the Armistice terms, he replied: "Maybe three, maybe four or five months. Who knows?" And his post-war comment on this Lorraine thrust was: "Its importance has always been exaggerated. It is regarded as the irresistible blow that was to fall and administer the knock-out to the Boche. That's nonsense. The Lorraine offensive was *not* in itself any more important than the attack then being prepared in Belgium." Its value lay in exploiting "a new direction where there was no possibility of encountering strong enemy forces," and in widening the offensive frontage. How greatly had experience modified Foch's conception of victory as the product of "one supreme stroke on one point"!

More significant strategically was the plan which he submitted to the Supreme War Council on November 3rd in view of Austria's surrender, to prepare a concentric advance on Munich by three Allied armies, which would be assembled on the Austro-German frontier within five weeks. Another, and even earlier, new menace to Germany's "rear" was being prepared. For Trenchard's Independent Air Force was about to extend its range and bomb Berlin on a scale hitherto unattempted in air warfare.

The internal situation and the obvious external developments in prospect were the factors which clinched Germany's decision to capitulate—not the hypothetical effect of any single blow uncertainly surmised by her. With starvation and revolution at home, a coming menace to their southern frontier and a continued

“TOUT LE MONDE À LA BATAILLE”

strain on their western, the German delegates would have no option but to accept the drastic terms of the Armistice which were presented to them by Foch. At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month a strange hush settled on the battle front—the war was over.

Chapter XXII

THE TRIUMPH OF THE VOCAL WILL

ON October 5th, Germany's armistice appeal to President Wilson had become known in France. Foch was delighted, and told Frazier, the American diplomat: "We are on the slope of victory, and victory has sometimes a way of galloping." That same day he set to work on the congenial task of drawing up a summary of the conditions that he considered essential. On the 8th he sent the summary to Clemenceau. Its first point was the evacuation within fifteen days of all invaded territory still occupied by the enemy. This corresponded with the basic condition indicated in President Wilson's preliminary reply to the German appeal. Foch's second point went much further. To assure a good "base of departure" for a new offensive if negotiations failed, the Allies should occupy three bridgeheads across the upper Rhine, at Strasbourg, Rastadt, and Neu-Brisach. Thirdly, the German territory west of the Rhine should be occupied as security for reparations. All railway material and military buildings must be left intact, and any war material that the Germans could not remove within a month must also be left.

The following afternoon Foch expounded his views to a meeting of the representatives of the Allied Governments, and he was instructed to work out his conditions in detail. On the 12th the German Chancellor seized upon President Wilson's tentative answer to declare his readiness "to conclude an armistice in conformity with the evacuation proposals presented by the President." This manœuvre was foiled by President Wilson's firm answer that the conditions of an armistice "must be left to the judgment and advice" of the Allies' "military counsellors,"

and that "no arrangement could be accepted by the Government of the United States which did not secure, by means of absolutely satisfactory safeguards and guarantees, the maintenance of the present superiority of the Allied armies . . . on the battlefield." Colonel House at once sailed for Europe as his representative.

On the 16th Foch addressed a long letter to Clemenceau in which he pointed out that, while his first two conditions had been based on "military requirements," the third was devised as a guarantee "for obtaining reparation for damage done in Allied countries." He then significantly asked: "After reparations have been paid, what is to be the fate of those territories? Are we to continue in occupation? Are we going to annex a part of the country, or to favour the creation of neutral, autonomous, or independent states, so forming a buffer?" Here we see the germ of what was to become Foch's ruling idea—that of a neutral Rhineland, as a buffer state.

"These are questions about which it is important that the military commander whose duty it will be to sign the Armistice, and discuss its terms when a request for it has been presented, should be informed. . . . For it is certain that the Armistice should give us full guarantees for obtaining, in the course of the peace negotiations, the terms that we wish to impose on the enemy; . . . that only the sacrifices of territory agreed to by the enemy at the time of signing the Armistice will remain final." This sentence suffices in itself to contradict the picture often painted of Foch as a simple-minded soldier, suited to the battlefield but without capacity for the affairs of state. It reveals once again a Foch who was most a realist when he was furthest from the battlefield, who could display the reasoning and the realism of a Machiavelli when he was dealing with human relations, of which one aspect is termed politics.

Foch's letter led up to the conclusion that it was indispensable for him to know the ulterior intentions of the Allied Governments as a foundation on which to build and expand his Armistice conditions. And for the purpose he asked to "be placed in close and continuous touch with some prominent member of the Foreign Office." The suggestion showed Foch's appreciation of

the truth that strategy is dependent upon policy, and should be closely regulated by it.

But Clemenceau viewed it with suspicion—he seems to have thought that Foch was attempting to gain a foothold that would give him a leverage upon policy. Clemenceau did not send a reply until a week later, and then began it with the specific statement that Foch was only the military adviser of the Government, and that even in this technical sphere the Government was free to reject or modify his advice. Diplomatic and political discussions bearing on the question of progress and the disposal of the Rhineland were outside his province. Clemenceau intimated that Foch would be kept informed of such discussions only in so far as they had a military bearing. And to reinforce his rebuke he enclosed a letter from the Foreign Minister, Pichon, who peremptorily refused Foch's request to be put in touch with some high official, saying : " Only the Minister himself can give you such information." He added : " Each man to his own profession. It is advisable that the scope of each be clearly defined, so as to avoid any confusion of powers."

Foch's later comment on these letters was : " I had no need of such a pedantic lecture on constitutional law and the limitation of power—especially pedantic on the part of the Quai d'Orsay. I had simply taken my stand on the level ground of reason and common sense. Peace is the logical finish of a war, and as it was close upon us, I wanted to know the Government's policy on the vital question of the Rhine, so as to turn my own steps in the same direction. That was all. As for the notion so vociferously proclaimed by M. Pichon and M. Clemenceau, that a general works on one side of a barrier and the politicians and diplomats on the other, there is nothing more false, or one can even say, more absurd. War is not a dual object, but a unity ; so, for that matter, is peace. . . . The two aspects are clearly and inseparably linked."

The rebuke did not deter Foch from pursuing his Rhineland goal. " You must strike while the iron is hot. If France intended to separate the Rhineland from Prussia, there was no time to be lost in shaping the Armistice accordingly." It is noteworthy

that Foch now extended his draft conditions to include the occupation of the main crossings of the lower Rhine. If these would provide a jumping-off line for a march on Berlin they would also close the arteries of communication between Berlin and the Rhineland.

Foch's next tussle was to be with the British. This time he won. And the effect of the first controversy is to be traced in his treatment of the second. He had learnt that Haig considered his armistice conditions too drastic, and likely to provoke a refusal. He also learnt that Haig had left Montreuil for London on the 18th, and he suspected, rightly, that Haig was going to lay his views and his protest before the British Government. Hence Foch had at once written to warn Clemenceau and urge him to stand firm. But Clemenceau's treatment of his other request now led Foch to seek a new ally in Poincaré, to reinforce his claim that the Rhine must be made an essential condition. "An armistice without the Rhine, and I should not sleep a single night. Do you wish to kill me?" He was soon reassured.

On the 24th Foch and Pétain had a long interview with Clemenceau, who approved Foch's conditions with certain additions suggested by Pétain and Mordacq. Next day Foch met the several Commanders-in-Chief to discuss his draft terms.

Haig considered the terms too severe and urged moderation: "The victorious Allied armies are extenuated. The units need to be reorganised. Germany is not broken in a military sense. During the last weeks her armies have withdrawn fighting very bravely and in excellent order. Therefore if it is really desired to conclude an armistice"—and this he thought very desirable—"it is necessary to grant Germany conditions which she can accept. That is to say, the evacuation of the invaded territory in France and Belgium as well as Alsace-Lorraine, and the restitution of the rolling stock taken at the beginning of the war from the French and Belgians. If more is demanded, there is a risk of prolonging the war, which has already cost so much, and of exasperating German national feeling, with very doubtful results. For the evacuation of all invaded territories and of Alsace-Lorraine is sufficient to seal the victory." Foch inter-

jected: "It cannot be said that the German Army is not defeated. . . . Certainly the Allied armies are not new, but victorious armies are never fresh . . . and nothing gives wings to an army like victory."

Pétain then gave his opinion, declaring that two things were essential. The first was that "the German Army should return to Germany without a gun or a tank, and with only its portable arms." He suggested that by specifying a brief time-limit the enemy could be prevented from removing his war material. Secondly, the Allies must occupy a zone on the east bank of the Rhine. But he added that "although these conditions are indispensable, it is hardly to be expected that the Germans will accept them." Pershing's suggested conditions agreed with those of Pétain.

Foch did not argue Haig's points. Instead, he disregarded them in the draft which he took to Clemenceau next day. He again told Clemenceau that Haig's conditions were insufficient, as they would allow the enemy to renew a defensive war inside their own frontier under favourable circumstances. On the other hand, he considered that Pétain's conditions demanded more than was necessary to fulfil the purpose of rendering Germany powerless. His own terms included the "immediate evacuation of invaded territory" to be carried out by successive stages, the last to be completed within fourteen days; during this process the enemy must abandon a minimum of 5,000 guns and 30,000 machine-guns—forming respectively a third and a half of their total armament as estimated by him. Secondly, the enemy's army must evacuate all German territory west of the Rhine, and the Allied armies should occupy the "principal crossings of the Rhine (Mayence, Coblenz, Cologne, Strasbourg) with bridge-heads at these points of thirty-kilometre radius on the right bank." Further, along the whole eastern bank, a strip forty kilometres wide should become a neutral zone. The enemy must also hand over 5,000 locomotives and 150,000 railway wagons. The blockade should be maintained until all these conditions were fulfilled.

Foch's memorandum concluded with a statement of the naval conditions that appeared to him "necessary and sufficient."

The enemy should hand over 150 submarines, and withdraw his surface fleet to the Baltic ports, the Allies occupying the port of Cuxhaven and the island of Heligoland. The enemy should also indicate the positions of all his minefields "except those moored in his own territorial waters."

Foch assured Clemenceau, and Clemenceau that evening assured House, that Germany was so thoroughly beaten that she would accept any terms offered. At that date it was a bold prediction and unjustified by the enemy's state at the moment. Austria and Turkey had not yet abandoned their partner; and, above all, revolution had not yet broken out in Germany. Haig's conditions accorded more closely with what we now know of the mood of the German leaders. Haig had become a realist; Foch was a man of faith. Events still in the womb of fate would justify his faith. The hard facts of Germany's internal state would compel the German representatives to bow before his will. Even at the moment of their surrender he would have but a hazy idea of those facts. But his power to believe what he willed to believe served as a substitute for knowledge—of things still hidden from the Allied command. His faith would achieve its supreme triumph. It was the foundation of an unconscious bluff which would reap the full harvest of victory without further exertion and cost; which would, indeed, be far more sure of gaining that result than a continuation of the offensive.

If political realism directed his course, it is Foch's greater glory that humanity was present in waiting. At the point where he had satisfied the needs of his country, his religion took charge. Calculating that his armistice terms would give his country all the fruits of victory, he sacrificed the ornamental laurels which might have been placed on his brow by a decisive victory in the field. It is true that such a victory might not have come from a continuation of the fighting, and of sacrifice. But Foch believed that it would. Here, certainly, the greater Foch's delusion, the greater is the tribute to his restraint.

The one serious objection to it came from Pershing, who, on October 30th, sent House a letter protesting against granting any armistice. His attitude was natural, for while his dream of build-

ing an independent American Army had been consummated, its vindication was still incomplete. But in the eyes of both House and Wilson, Foch's assurance outweighed Pershing's protest. And Foch himself pointed out that this protest was inconsistent with Pershing's approval of his own conditions as sufficient to render Germany helpless.

To clarify the problem, House asked: "Will you tell us, Marshal, solely from the military point of view, apart from any other consideration, whether you would prefer the Germans to reject or sign the Armistice as outlined here?"

To this question Foch delivered the historic reply: "War is only a means to results. If the Germans now sign an armistice under our conditions those results are in our possession. This being achieved, no man has the right to cause another drop of blood to be shed."

The results he sought by his conditions went, however, far beyond the military needs and Wilson's purview. Once the German Army was out of the way, France would be able to frame the peace on her terms rather than on those of President Wilson. Thus the ironical result of his action in allowing Foch to settle the Armistice conditions was that he nullified the peace conditions set out in his own Fourteen Points.

With equal irony, the one political voice raised against Foch's right of decision was that of the French Prime Minister. At an informal preliminary meeting with Lloyd George and House on the 29th, Clemenceau declared: "If Foch decides, the Governments are suppressed. I propose that we consult Marshal Foch and all others whose advice may be necessary. Then we will transmit our conclusions to President Wilson." But the others had more faith in Foch than Clemenceau felt. Lloyd George pointed out that to transmit the terms through Washington would prevent any give and take, forcing the Germans to accept or reject the terms as a whole. House then suggested that President Wilson, after endorsing the terms, should simply tell the Germans to make their appeal to Foch, under a white flag. This solution was adopted.

On November 1st there was another of these informal meet-

ings—which were adroitly used to decide what the formal meetings of the Supreme War Council should decide. Foch attended this meeting and also Sir Eric Geddes, representing the Allied Naval Council. As a sop to British objections, Foch had agreed to give up the demand for a bridgehead at Strasbourg; as this was the bridgehead he had claimed in his first proposals, his readiness to surrender it in favour of the later-claimed bridgeheads is evidence of the way his appetite had grown—outgrowing the military object. Lloyd George seems to have recognised this fact, for he remarked: “All the great cities of Western Germany will be in our hands. The Conference must realise that we are making a very stiff demand. I ask Marshal Foch if it would not be possible to secure the bridgeheads required for military purposes without occupying the great cities.”

Foch replied: “Mainz is absolutely indispensable. Frankfort will not be occupied, although I admit that it will be within two miles of the occupied territory and under the guns of the Allies. I must also insist that Cologne is of tremendous importance, as it is the junction of many railways and the focus of the land communications of the Palatinate; therefore I regard Cologne as an indispensable bridgehead.”

Foch further declared that he “could never agree to” Haig’s proposals, for “the enemy would be in a better defensive situation than they were in now.” “If Germany should break off the peace negotiations the Allies ought to be in a position to destroy her.” But once more he did not confine himself to the military sphere: “If peace follows the Armistice, then we should have in our hands the territory we wanted, even under Field-Marshal Haig’s conditions. But the question is what pledges and guarantees we should have in order to secure the indemnities we require.”

Lloyd George interposed to point out that Haig’s doubt was not as to the advantage of possessing the bridgeheads, but as to the enemy’s willingness to surrender them. “Haig took the view that the German Army was by no means broken. Wherever you hit them they hit back hard and inflicted heavy casualties. They were being gradually pushed back . . . but showed none of the

symptoms of a disorganised army. Their retirement was effected in perfect order and was conducted with the greatest skill. . . . Sir Douglas Haig considered that they would retreat from their present line of 400 kilometres to one of 245 kilometres, and that nothing the Allies could do would prevent it. On this shorter line they would save seventy divisions and would be able to hold on." Hence, Lloyd George remarked: "The real point is whether we are in a position to enforce Marshal Foch's terms."

To this pertinent question Foch replied that, if he was asked whether the German Army was now reduced to acceptance, his answer would be "No." But "without the bridgeheads we could never be master of Germany. It was essential first to be master of the Rhine." Hence it was better to risk refusal than to ask anything less. He admitted that "the German Army could undoubtedly take up a new position this side of the Rhine, and that we could not prevent it." But he said that he could continue driving the Germans back during the winter, and that "the collapse of Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey" would have an important effect on the situation.

There is a significant change to be discerned in Foch's attitude now as compared with a week or so earlier. He was coming to realise, as Haig had already done, that the prospects of his offensive were waning and the enemy slipping out of reach. But his conviction of what was necessary and his hope of new developments—outside the Western Front—combined to reinforce his faith.

He was willing, however, to concede what did not concern him, and urged that the enemy's acquiescence in his military terms should not be endangered by severe naval terms. Hence he opposed the demand for the surrender of 10 battleships and 6 battle cruisers as well as the 150 submarines. He scoffingly asked the British: "As for the German surface fleet, what do you fear from it? During the whole war only a few of its units have ventured from their ports. The surrender of these units will be merely a manifestation, which will please the public but nothing more. Why make the Armistice harder? for I repeat

that its sole object is to place Germany *hors de combat*. . . . I do not understand why we should demand the battle cruisers. . . . It would not be right to ask the armies to go on fighting in order to secure these conditions."

Geddes retorted: " Marshal Foch is wrong in saying that the submarines alone have hurt us. But for the Grand Fleet the ships it is now proposed to take would have been out on the trade routes and inflicting great destruction on the Allies. They would even interrupt the arrival of the American troops. Marshal Foch has no idea how much trouble the High Seas Fleet has given us—because the Grand Fleet has always held it in check. If these ships are not surrendered, the Grand Fleet, during the Armistice, will be in the same state of tension as that of two armies opposed to each other in the trenches."

Lloyd George settled the difference by the compromise solution, effective but less humiliating, that the naval terms should demand the internment of the enemy's surface ships instead of their actual surrender. If the British Admiralty was dissatisfied with the solution, so also was Foch, and he made up his mind that if any "give" was necessary in the Armistice negotiations, his generosity should take a naval form.

The relaxation would be unnecessary. And another of Lloyd George's calculated evasions would be a means of absolving Foch from it. Austria's appeal for an armistice had been received. Lloyd George insisted that the Allied generals should prepare terms at once and that they should be submitted to Austria before an answer was sent to Germany. For he shrewdly argued: "As soon as Austria is out, Germany will capitulate." So, again, he postponed a final decision on the naval terms until Austria's answer was received, contending that "if Austria accepted our armistice, we could then put stiffer terms to Germany."

On November 4th Austria accepted terms which were accurately summed up in Clemenceau's remark: "We have left the Emperor his breeches and nothing else." Next day President Wilson notified the German Government that Foch was authorised to receive their representatives and to communicate to them the conditions for an armistice. His note also stated that the Allies

accepted the Fourteen Points as a basis for peace, with two reservations—the freedom of the seas and reparation of all damage caused to the civil population. The first was a concession to British opinion ; the second, to French. When Lloyd George objected that reparations were a condition of peace, not of an armistice, Clemenceau cleverly and disarmingly argued : “ I wish only to make mention of the principle,” while the French Finance Minister strengthened its potential effect by inserting the innocent-looking qualification that “ any future claims or demands on the part of the Allies remain unaffected.”

* * * * *

The day of November 7th was half an hour old, when Foch received a wireless message from the German Supreme Command giving the names of their envoys and asking him to fix a meeting-place. It added : “ The German Government would be glad if, in the interest of humanity, the arrival of the German delegation might cause a provisional suspension of hostilities.” Foch ignored this request in his reply and simply told the German envoys to present themselves at the outposts on Debeney’s front. Besides being the nearest it was a comparatively safe route to take.

At 5 p.m., accompanied by Admiral Wemyss as naval representative, Foch left Senlis by a special train for Rethondes, in the forest of Compiègne. His train was run on to a siding built for super-heavy railway guns. There was another track, still empty. Foch, in jovial mood, entertained the British naval delegates in the dining saloon of his train, while in the dark forest outside a ring of sentries guarded the approaches to the clearing. Dinner finished, the other track was still empty. Foch retired to his *wagon-lit*, and to sleep. Not until seven o’clock next morning did the other train steam slowly into the siding ; the German envoys had been delayed by road blocks behind the German front. Weygand boarded the train to announce that Foch would receive them at or after 9 a.m.

“ It was the best day in my life . . . when I saw them in front of me, aligned along the other side of the table, I said to myself : ‘ There’s the German Empire ! ’ I can assure you that

I was a proud man. I thought : ' We'll be polite, but we must show them who we are.' " With his voice he would drown the fanfares of Manteuffel that had echoed in his ears for almost half a century. He became a schoolboy again.

As the envoys filed into the saloon carriage at nine o'clock they were received " stiffly but courteously " by Weygand and Admiral Hope. Weygand said that he would inform Marshal Foch of their arrival. A few minutes later Foch appeared, with Wemyss, and exchanged salutes. His stern face showed no trace of pity for the envoys' humiliation. He had much to repay. Erzberger, who headed the delegation, had the impression of Foch as " a little man of impulsive ways who showed at first glance the habit of command." In a muffled tone, he presented his fellow-envoys to Foch, who curtly remarked : " Gentlemen, have you any papers ? We must examine their validity."

Foch then withdrew for a moment with Wemyss and Weygand to examine the credentials signed by Prince Max of Baden which gave Erzberger, Count Oberndorff, Major-General von Winterfeldt, and Naval Captain Vanselow " full power . . . to conduct . . . negotiations for an armistice and to conclude an agreement to that effect, provided it be approved by the German Government." Two younger officers completed the delegation. One of them, Captain Geyer, was militarily the most significant member, for he was the man who had framed the infiltration tactics and written the textbooks on which the German Army had been trained for its devastating punches in the spring.

Satisfied with the examination, Foch seated himself at the table, Weygand on his right, Wemyss on his left. Erzberger sat down opposite Wemyss and Winterfeldt opposite Foch. By strange coincidence Winterfeldt's father had helped to settle the terms of the French capitulation in 1870.

Foch, faithful to his principles, took the offensive with the question : " What's the purpose of your visit ? What do you want of me ?"

Erzberger courteously replied that they had come to receive " the proposals of the Allied Powers towards the conclusion of an armistice. . . ."

"I have no proposal to make."

Disconcerted and mystified, the Germans sat silent. Then Oberndorff asked: "How do you wish us to express ourselves? We are not standing on any form of words. We are ready to say that we ask the conditions of an armistice."

"I have no conditions to give you."

Erzberger then began to read out President Wilson's note. Foch stopped him. "Do you wish to ask for an armistice? If so, say so—formally."

"Yes, that's what we are asking."

"Good, then we'll read out to you the conditions on which it can be obtained."

Weygand thereupon read the principal clauses, which were translated as he read them. Meantime, Foch sat as gravely solemn as a statue of Justice, save for the relief of an occasional sharp pull at his moustache. Wemyss played with his eyeglass. Winterfeldt began to look more and more crestfallen. Erzberger and Oberndorff might have been listening to a casual conversation.

When Weygand finished, Erzberger intervened to ask that military operations should be immediately suspended, saying that revolution had broken out, and that the soldiers were refusing to obey orders. He feared that Bolshevism might gain a grip, and once Central Europe was invaded by this scourge, Western Europe would have difficulty in escaping it. The German Government needed freedom from Allied pressure so that they could restore discipline in the Army and order in the country.

The account of Germany's internal state was a revelation to Foch. It provided facts to confirm his faith—and reinforce his bluff. He abruptly rejected Erzberger's plea. "You are suffering from a loser's malady. I am not afraid of it. Western Europe will find means of defending itself against the danger."

Then Winterfeldt produced a paper, saying that he had been entrusted with a special mission by the Government and the Supreme Command. He read out a declaration to the effect that: "The Armistice conditions to which we have just listened require careful examination. In view of our intention to reach a settle-

ment the examination will be made as rapidly as possible ; all the same, this will require a certain interval of time. . . . During this time the struggle between our armies will continue and will inevitably take toll of numerous victims, among the troops and the people, who will have fallen needlessly at the last minute and who might be preserved for their families." Hence the German Government and command repeated their original proposal for a suspension of hostilities.

Foch inflexibly replied : " No. I represent here the Allied Governments, who have settled their conditions. Hostilities cannot cease before the signing of the Armistice."

" Will it at least be possible to prolong for twenty-four hours the interval allowed for our reply. We need time to communicate with our Government."

" We will facilitate this communication, but the time-limit has been fixed by our Governments, and it cannot be prolonged ; it's for seventy-two hours, and it will expire Monday morning [the 11th] at eleven o'clock."

One surmises that in this hour of triumph Foch recalled the discussions between Bismarck and Thiers, and that he was revenging the contumely suffered by the favourite author of his boyhood.

Captain von Helldorf was then despatched to Spa with the Armistice terms. Meanwhile the German delegation asked for opportunity to obtain an explanation of some of the detailed points. They were granted it, but to emphasise its purely explanatory nature Weygand and Admiral Hope were assigned for the purpose. The Germans did not contest any of the chief military or naval conditions, but they protested that the surrender of so many machine-guns left them insufficient to maintain order ; that the time allowed for withdrawal across the Rhine was too short for an orderly retirement ; that the maintenance of the blockade and the surrender of railway material were inhuman, as these would paralyse the task of feeding the people.

Foch meantime had sent a telephone message to Clemenceau—" All goes well," and he followed this by a written report that the Germans had accepted in principle the Armistice terms. After

reading it, Clemenceau buried his head in his hands and wept silently; then checked himself, and cried: "It's absurd. I'm no longer master of my nerves; this was too much for me, but all of a sudden I had a vision of 1870, the defeat, the shame, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine—and now that's all wiped out. Surely it's not a dream?" He hurried next morning to seek confirmation from Foch, who had gone back to Senlis for a few hours. "Marshal Foch dwelt above all on his own astonishment when he saw the Germans accept, so easily, the hard conditions as to the bridgeheads, the surrender of the fleet, the occupation of the Rhineland, while, on the contrary, they turned pale . . . when it came to the surrender of guns, machine-guns, and locomotives." Foch's surprise shows not only that he had forgotten the Commune, but that he had not yet appreciated the real cause of the enemy's abject surrender.

Hence the unreality of the well-intentioned telegram which he had just sent to the several Commanders-in-Chief: "The enemy, disorganised by our repeated attacks, is giving way along the whole front. . . . I call on the energy and initiative of the Commanders-in-Chief and their armies to render decisive the results obtained." The explanation of his outlook was given by himself: "With the Germans one must be prepared for anything." He believed that the delegates' story of Germany's internal break-up was only a military subterfuge.

On his return to Rethondes he received the detailed observations of the German delegates upon his terms, and prepared his answer after a telephone talk with Clemenceau. To the appeal that they might be given more time to withdraw from the left bank of the Rhine, he merely replied that they could re-form their army when they reached the right bank. To the objection that they were not left sufficient machine-guns to repress insurrection, he said that they could use their rifles. To the question as to the Allies' future intentions in the Rhineland, he answered that he did not know and that it was not his business. To the complaint that they were not left sufficient locomotives for the transport of food supplies, he retorted that he was only taking such locomotives as the Germans themselves had taken from

the French and Belgian people. He made few concessions. The Germans were allowed fifteen days instead of fourteen for the evacuation of invaded territory, thirty-one days instead of twenty-five to complete their withdrawal ; and the number of machine-guns to be surrendered was reduced from 30,000 to 25,000.

Foch awoke on the 10th, a Sunday, with the feeling that the day would see the end of the war. He left the train to go to Mass. But, while he was praying, uneasiness was growing among those who stayed behind. For a fresh flux was threatened by the news that, following the Kaiser's abdication, a new Government had been formed in Berlin. Both the Allied and the German delegations were now in a quandary. Would the new Government recognise the authority of the envoys sent by Prince Max, and would it have the power to fulfil the Armistice terms ? Evening came, and still no word had come. In the forest clearing at Rethondes the darkness outside the lighted windows of the two trains was no denser than that which reigned within. At half-past six Foch sent a note of reminder that the time-limit was due to expire next morning. Its recipients were incapable of reply.

But towards eight o'clock a wireless telegram was intercepted :

"The German Government to the plenipotentiaries at the Allied Headquarters : The German Government accepts the conditions of the Armistice communicated to it on November 8th.

"THE IMPERIAL CHANCELLOR—3,084."

The number, as Erzberger explained, was a code figure to establish its authenticity.

Foch thereupon asked the Germans "if they were at last ready to sign, and the sooner the better, if they truly desired, as they had not ceased repeating, to avoid useless bloodshed." But they asked permission first to decipher and discuss a long telegram which was just arriving from Hindenburg.

At eleven o'clock Foch lay down to snatch some rest. It was the first night since the Battle of the Marne, the second night during the whole war, that he missed his full ration of sleep. Two o'clock came on the morning of the 11th. The Germans were still in their own train. Five minutes past—they sent word that they were ready. Fifteen minutes—the delegates assembled

in Foch's saloon. Weygand read out the slightly modified text, which was discussed anew, clause by clause. For over an hour Erzberger argued against the continuation of the blockade, as being a continued act of war. When he remarked that it "was not fair," the British admiral opposite retorted: "Not fair! Don't forget that you've sunk our ships without any distinction!" Bitter memories and inability to realise the conditions in Germany combined towards an unjustifiable infliction that would be bitterly remembered when other memories had begun to fade.

At five minutes past five discussion finished. Five minutes later the delegates affixed their signature to the agreement. At Foch's suggestion the hour of signing was timed as "5 a.m.," so that hostilities might cease exactly at 11 a.m. Erzberger read out a declaration that, while the German Government would make every effort "to see that the terms are fulfilled," the delegation registered a formal protest that these "may plunge the German people into anarchy and famine." The declaration concluded: "A nation of seventy millions suffers, but does not die."

Foch made the brief comment "*Très bien!*" but whether in irony or in homage to a soldierly sentiment will never be known. A message was then sent by wireless and telephone: "Hostilities will cease along the entire front on November 11th at 11 a.m. French time." It was indeed the French hour. At seven o'clock Foch left for Paris "with the Armistice in my pocket." As his car approached the long-menaced capital the early morning mist was dispersed by the sun. He called first to see Clemenceau and handed him the document with the words: "My work is finished; your work begins." Then, after a visit to Poincaré, he went home—to bear the good news to his family. "It was a market day, and, while I was having my lunch, they saw my car standing outside. They then began a demonstration under my windows. So I went off. I was recognised in the Place de l'Opéra. There was a bigger demonstration than ever . . . it seemed likely that they would drag me out of my car. . . . We succeeded in giving them the slip in the Rue Lafayette"—Foch could not escape the symbolical.

Most significant and self-revealing was his sentiment as he watched the crowds who were swarming to celebrate the end—after fifty-three months' trial—of the war. "Joy over delivery . . . but there was something more than that. It was victory—I repeat, victory ! We could do what we wished with it."

Chapter XXIII

THE CLUTCH ON THE RHINE

ON the morrow of the Armistice Foch issued an order of the day, addressed to the officers and soldiers of the Allied armies: "After resolutely repulsing the enemy for months, you confidently attacked him with an untiring energy. You have won the greatest battle in history and saved the most sacred of causes, the liberty of the world. Be proud. You have adorned your colours with immortal glory. Posterity reserves its gratitude for you."

When the order was brought for him to sign, he hesitated over the last sentence. Should it have been "will reserve"? After asking Weygand's advice he kept the present tense. But not merely on a point of style. "The future? That would be a command. The present is certain!" His preference for the present was both characteristic and prophetic.

For a few weeks joy would be unshadowed. While the popular radiance lasted it would be focussed, above all, on Foch. Then he would begin to slip, and to be pushed, into the shadow.

On November 17th the Allied Army of Occupation began its march forward from the armistice line. Forty divisions were at the outset to be the unwelcome paid guests of the German Government. On December 1st their advanced guards crossed the pre-1870 frontier of Germany. The advance was slow—slower than the timetable. The tardy pace of this unresisted march cast its reflection upon the vaunting claims that only the Armistice prevented a rapid pursuit to the Rhine by the victorious Allies. Not until December 13th did they cross the Rhine; four days more elapsed before they completely occupied the bridge-heads and mounted the guard on the Rhine. "From its shores,"

as Foch wrote, "they beheld vanquished Germany at their feet; at the slightest attempt on her part to lift her head and cause trouble, they had but to make a move to stop it. Posted there, they enabled the Allied Governments to dictate to the Central Powers whatever conditions of peace they might consider it proper to impose."

In Alsace-Lorraine the French troops had earlier arrived—as home-comers, not as occupiers. Following in their wake, Foch himself went to Metz—in the fulfilment of a vow and a dream. To that city which he had left as a young student, he came back as the leader of the greatest host any one man had ever commanded.

He had seen it once in the interval, but as a nameless visitor, risking his career on a sentimental escapade. Some years before the war, the temptation to see his old college had led him to defy the regulations which debarred the annexed provinces to French officers. Knowing that it might cost him arrest and imprisonment for spying, fearing that his passage was noted, he had taken the risk of gaining Metz by way of Luxembourg. He had gone straight to St. Clement's. It had seemed deserted, and he began to wander round its silent cloisters, when, suddenly, he ran into a sister of mercy. In talking to her he forgot caution, until she startled him with the remark: "You seem to know the House well." Explanations would have been embarrassing. He broke off the conversation, and caught the next train from Metz.

The surreptitious visit had only quickened his hunger of soul. During the war Metz became the symbol of his goal. Writing to an old friend in January, 1915, he said: "I have already asked Joffre and the Government for the command of the army corps at Metz. My dream is to carry my fanion there. . . . After that glorious day, I shall feel repaid for everything." It would be long postponed.

But it came at last on November 26th, 1918. At eleven o'clock the previous night Foch's train steamed into the station and drew up beneath the bomb-shattered roof. Foch alighted and was received in the Kaiser's special waiting-room. "Motor-cars had come to meet us, but I did not wish to take one. I was so

happy that I said to Weygand : ' Stop, here's a good cigar for you ; let's go for a stroll.' For an hour I piloted him round Metz without losing him. The weather was vile. The streets were covered with snow. There was no one about. In the square we saw Boche statues which had been dragged from their plinths and hurled to the ground. Yes, I shall certainly never forget it." They stole round for a glimpse of the dim outline of the college. And, puffing at his pipe, Foch pointed out the little tobacconist's where he had bought his first cigarettes.

When daylight came the vista changed from intimacy to splendour. His old 39th Division was assembling for a great review. " To see French troops marching past on the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville at Metz was an ample reward for all my efforts." After forty-seven years, the fanfares of Foch drowned the echoes of Manteuffel's. The ceremony over, Foch said : " Now I am going to thank the Lord of Hosts for having granted me the victory. The troops can dismiss." To render thanks, he felt, should be a voluntary act, not a compulsory parade. But the Cathedral was packed for this *Te Deum*. " It was extraordinary. . . . When it was all over, the crowd sang the ' Marseillaise ' in the church." " I always used to tell myself, in the old days, that I should not like to die till I could hang up my sword, as a votive offering, on the walls of Metz Cathedral. Oh, I shall do it ! I have promised !" As patriotism merged into his religion, so did his exultation over the *revanche* merge into a higher sense of liberation. With this he would fill his lungs every time he came to the regained provinces. On one such visit, noticing that the abandon with which he joined in the national anthem had been remarked, he explained : " To sing a full-throated ' Marseillaise ' in Alsace, where formerly one was forbidden even to hum it—I know no greater pleasure !" To breathe freely once again, that was the clue not merely to his momentary abandon but to his future policy of precaution.

The effect is to be traced in the note, the first of a series, which he addressed to the French Government on November 27th, the day after his ceremonial release of Metz from its half-century's captivity. He claimed that the Rhine must be the future western

frontier of Germany, and, further, that the victors must mount guard upon it in perpetuity. His argument took as its starting-point the question of potential military man-power: "That point dominated all others." Germany, even if deprived of Alsace-Lorraine, the Posen region and Schleswig, would still number over sixty million inhabitants. She would still outnumber an enlarged France and Belgium by ten millions, and her higher birthrate would tend to increase the disproportion. "The situation, then, would be appreciably more perilous for us after the war than before—because Russia's man-power was no longer available to redress the deficit, and might even coalesce with Germany."

There was one counterbalance, and only one—the natural barrier offered by the Rhine. "Whoever holds its bridges is master of the situation; he can easily repulse invasion, and, if attacked, can carry the war into the enemy's country." By using this great ditch as the frontier, France would be safeguarded against a Germany which, "by reason of her ever-increasing population and the militarist spirit that will always manifest itself," would ever be a menace. "Any other frontier is bad for us, and may give us illusory security, but not genuine security."

There is no question that Foch desired that the Rhine should also become the eastern frontier of France. But he came early to fear that this was an impracticable ideal, if he did not fully appreciate the strength of the resistance to it. His alternative from the outset was to convert the Rhineland into a buffer state separated from Germany and unarmed, while under the military control of France. Foch supported his arguments with the historical analysis of the Dutch occupation of a fortress barrier in Flanders during the eighteenth century, of Britain's creation of Belgium as a buffer state in the nineteenth century, and of the use of the Rhine barrier itself by Prussia and Austria after 1815. If he was historically justified in contending that a military barrier had then been considered necessary, and had proved useful, in supplementing pacts of mutual assistance, he omitted the fact that these precautions had not been taken at the territorial expense of the defeated Power.

Foch believed in the sovereign virtues of his new panacea as fervently as he had once believed in the offensive. He was as single-minded as ever. He preached this new theory of *sûreté* with the same fervour as his old. Seeing only one thing at a time, he regarded this aim as the ideal military guarantee of security. He did not pause to ask himself whether it was politically wise or practicable. It may seem curious that a man who had just found such heavenly relief in being able to draw a free breath in Alsace-Lorraine should fail to ponder the danger of curtailing another's freedom. But, after following Foch through so many years, there is no ground for surprise.

On December 1st Foch travelled to London with Clemenceau, and was accorded a tremendous ovation by a people who saw in him the creator of victory. In return, he spoke warmly of the British Army and of Haig. That evening Foch attended a meeting at 10, Downing Street, where, according to Wilson, he "developed his proposals that in order to face the sixty-five to seventy-six million Boches over the Rhine, he wanted to combine all the French, Belgian, Luxembourg, and Rhenish provinces in one Confederation, amounting to fifty-four millions, which, with the help of the British, might hope to cope with the Boches. Both Lloyd George and Bonar Law were opposed to this, as making of the Rhenish provinces another Alsace and Lorraine." Foch's emphasis on material, or, rather, numerical factors is as significant as his neglect of moral factors.

On the following day he obtained permission to extend the Armistice and to exact further pledges if necessary. He also expressed the view that the British ought to keep ten divisions in the occupied territory even after peace was signed, and a further ten in Belgium or France. On the 4th he returned to France, delighted with his own reception but disappointed at the way his proposals had been received. That disappointment was a foretaste of a greater.

Clemenceau had adopted the Rhine frontier for Germany as the basis of his peace proposals, coupled with the continued occupation of the bridgeheads. But he had few illusions as to the difficulty of gaining the Allied statesmen to its acceptance,

especially as President Wilson was coming to Europe with the Covenant of the League of Nations as his basis for a secure peace.

The Peace Conference was unpromisingly late in gathering. Wilson did not arrive until Friday, December 13th, and further postponement was caused by Lloyd George's desire to obtain a decisive mandate from the British electorate. Not until January 18th did the Conference open. The delay in assembly foreshadowed the delay in agreement, and with delay fresh complications arose to cause further delay.

The armies were growing restive, the men clamouring for demobilisation. Foch began to fear that they would slip away like sand between his fingers. Henry Wilson's diary for February 3rd has the entry: "Dined with Foch and Madame Foch. He is very anxious about the general situation and the total inability of the Peace Conference to come to any decision on any subject. He says his men won't stand it much longer, and will demobilise themselves just as the Belgians are doing. Foch has a supreme contempt for such ideas as League of Nations, Mandatories, etc." He had equally little belief in any proposals for limiting men or arms. He had previously remarked: "We can no more limit the number of men trained to arms in Germany than the Germans could limit the output of coal in England." Because of this view he was more convinced than ever that the line of the Rhine, no less and no more, was the one guarantee adequate. On January 10th he again set forth his views in a memorandum which he laid before both the French and the Allied Governments. He would have liked the chance to plead his case in the Conference, but on the morning it met he received a telephone message that Clemenceau thought it preferable for him not to attend. The ground given was that Foch's position as Allied Commander-in-Chief disqualified him from being a French spokesman. The real ground was probably the fact of Foch being a soldier.

Foch did not find the decision agreeable. "It is really extraordinary that M. Clemenceau did not think of me in the first place as a suitable person to overcome the resistance of President Wilson and Lloyd George. It was fortunate that the Supreme Commander who led the Allied armies to victory was

a Frenchman . . . the future security of France and the Allies, as well as the avoidance of more aggression from Germany . . . were questions eminently military in nature. It was the right and duty of a commander to express his views. France's representative at the Conference could use him to illustrate his theory and overcome resistance. He could say: 'I am obliged to accede to Foch in all that pertains to security. Foch will not hear of any solution other than the Rhine as a military frontier. Anything you could offer me in exchange—the disarmament of Germany, pacts, temporary occupation—he considers entirely inadequate. I cannot ignore his resistance or combat his state of mind. For it is obvious that on this point he has the country at his back.' ” The argument certainly reveals Foch as the simple soldier.

It is unlikely that with more opportunity to express his views he would have made more impression on the Allied statesmen. For, in fact, he was tireless in taking opportunities to proclaim his opinion. And it rather tended to harden the resistance. Neither President Wilson nor Lloyd George was sympathetic to military intervention in discussions of policy. But for a time the issue was postponed by Wilson's return to America and the necessity for a detailed study of the various problems by expert committees. In the interval the question of extending the Armistice, already renewed twice, came up for consideration—at a moment when there were alarmist rumours of a rearming by Germany. Henry Wilson and Diaz voted for a further encroachment on German territory. Bliss opposed them. Foch gave no hint of his view. But after the meeting he told Bliss privately that he was in sympathy with the American view, and that the other might cause a fresh blaze. Foch may have been inspired by the idea of gaining American sympathy for his own Rhine project, but the incident at least shows that he kept a cooler head than Wilson. More significantly he argued that “an immediate peace should be made with Germany so that the wheels of industry should be started in motion throughout the world.”

After his meeting with the German delegates on February 17th, Foch took up still more strongly the question of an early settlement. He was convinced that the Germans were in the mood

for it and ready to accept "whatever terms we exact." While confident that they had no force capable of resistance, he declared that delay might be dangerous. If the Allies would determine the three principal conditions—the strength of Germany's armed forces, her frontiers, and the indemnity to be paid—he would guarantee that the Germans would accept them the following day. "The world would then pass from a state of war to a state of peace for which it longs so ardently, and there would be universal rejoicing."

As regards the first condition, he advocated that Germany should be restricted to a conscript army of 100,000 men on a basis of one year's service. As regards the indemnities he proposed, more wisely than the French politicians, the fixing of a lump sum for Germany to pay. Admitting that it was not his business to consider this point, he suggested a hundred milliards of francs—twenty times the indemnity demanded of France in 1870. One ground for an early settlement, in his opinion, was the need of concentrating on the Russian problem; here he favoured the idea of giving help to all the anti-Bolshevik elements in Russia and, even more, to Russia's neighbours—for he did not trust the capacity of Denikin and Koltchak.

Unfortunately for his object, he could not refrain from declaring that any preliminary peace treaty ought to lay down that "under no circumstances will the German Empire extend beyond the Rhine," whatever might be the ultimate decision as to the Rhenish Provinces. This demand, ceaselessly reiterated, cost him the American sympathy that he had so carefully sought to woo. President Wilson, in particular, saw in Foch's arguments for a quick settlement merely a move to "hurry us into an acquiescence" in the French "plans with regard to the western bank of the Rhine." There was some ground for the suspicion, and it would recoil on Foch's own position.

He had established an advanced headquarters at Luxembourg, whence he later transferred it to Kreuznach, close to the Rhine. If this move enabled him to supervise arrangements for a possible advance into Germany, it also gave him the opportunity to keep touch with any developments in the Rhineland

Separatist movement, that feeble shoot so assiduously nursed by Mangin and the staff of the French Army of Occupation. While disorder reigned in Berlin and Munich there was a partial and momentary impulse to consider autonomy, and a few meetings were held. The resolution passed at one such meeting, on February 22nd, was carried to Foch, who sent back a reply to the effect that the people of the Palatinate would soon be able to speak openly, and that guarantees would be given them to enable them to act without fearing the return of the German authorities.

The hope of an independent Republic, voluntarily constituted, would prove a fresh delusion. Those who held it were still, in imagination, living in 1793. Least happy of all was the attempt at forcible incubation. Yet it would seem that Foch would have liked still more forcible measures. For, in regretful contemplation of what might have been, he remarked: "I say it was necessary to pave the way for such a policy, seize firm hold of the territory, exact the immediate expulsion of all Prussian officials, etc."

On March 14th President Wilson arrived back in France, and the Conference faced the larger issues. If Wilson's position at home was now weakened by the Senatorial opposition, he was not in the mood for compromise either at home or abroad. And in resisting Clemenceau's arguments for the Rhine frontier he had the full support of Lloyd George. Yet by skilfully exploiting the vulnerable points in their armour, by playing on Lloyd George's maritime claims and Wilson's dominant desire for the acceptance of the League Covenant, Clemenceau gradually wore down their resistance and obtained concessions far larger than they had contemplated or desired. Apart from the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine, the Saar basin was to be alienated from Germany for a period of fifteen years—when a plebiscite would determine its future—and its coal-mines were to be ceded to France. Reparations were left indefinite, so as to extract all that could be squeezed out of Germany. The left bank of the Rhine and a fifty-kilometre strip on the right bank were to be demilitarised for ever, and the occupation was to be continued for a period of years—the Mainz bridgehead to be held for fifteen

years, the Coblenz bridgehead for ten years, and the Cologne bridgehead for five years.

Clemenceau's achievement, however, failed to satisfy Foch. In his eyes the most satisfactory compromise could not atone for the sacrifice of a principle—a principle that consisted of a water line. The decisive obstacle in the way of his desire was another man of principle, President Wilson, who based himself on a moral line.

Foch seems to have deceived himself as to the strength of this obstacle, perhaps mistaking Colonel House's tolerant understanding of his point of view for an acquiescence in his aim. Foch ascribed the ultimate American stand against his desire "largely to the intrigues and the insistence of the English." "Once Germany had been beaten, England was sure to revert instinctively to her traditional policy of checking the victor—in this case, France—from becoming over-powerful." "Neither would she approve of a Rhineland separated from Germany and therefore disposed to gravitate, politically and economically, within the orbit of France. . . . The balance of power in Europe, for centuries the A B C of England's statesmen, might be endangered. Only cold resolution on our part could overcome such strong opposition. We should have done all that was possible to prevent an Anglo-American pact."

With rather unbalanced bitterness Foch later complained that while France had gained nothing, England had obtained all her own demands. "Those demands were far from being moderate; they were colossal." Confounding the Armistice with the Peace, forgetful that England was as relieved as France was aggrieved when the Germans sank their own fleet at Scapa, Foch declared: "The greater portion of the German fleet . . . was forced to deliver itself into the hands of England. . . . History can offer no analogy (*sic*) for such a cession. Sedan was nothing in comparison." His constitutional inability to understand naval questions and history is even more reflected in his astonishing statement that the German Navy "had never constituted a serious menace to England." So, also, there was a sublime disregard of the part played and the losses suffered by the British mercantile

marine in his remark: "And England did not limit herself to the Navy, but took unto herself the best items of Germany's commercial fleet." He could not see that the replacement of Britain's torpedoed shipping was analogous to the handing over of locomotives and coal-mines to France. He was more to the point in his reflections on the surrender of the German colonies, if they ignored France's share of the profits.

Despite Foch's faulty comparisons, there was a fundamental truth underlying them. For the nature of sea warfare is such that the mere curtailment of the German Navy was a firmer guarantee of naval security than the similar curtailment of the German Army was of military security. But while enforced disarmament is compatible with moral principles, the enforced dismemberment of a nation is not. Foch's desired guarantee could only be fulfilled by placing a part of Germany in permanent captivity. In believing that "cold resolution" would have gained his object, he overlooked the moral objection to it, and underestimated the weight of public opinion against it both in America and Britain.

Foch's belief that the Americans would have accepted his plan, if left to themselves, may have been due to the fact that he had mooted it to the British and had felt their resistance first. Perhaps, also, his outlook may have been affected by his preliminary tussle with the British over the future of the German Army, wherein he had to forgo a principle. He was defeated by Henry Wilson, who advocated that Germany should be compelled to adopt a long-service professional instead of a short-service conscript army. His argument was accepted by Lloyd George, House, and Clemenceau, although as a concession to Foch the limit of 100,000 men was decided upon instead of Wilson's figure of 140,000. Wilson remarked: "So I got my principle, but not my numbers, and Foch got his numbers but not his principle. An amazing state of affairs."

When "the other" Wilson arrived from America he at first showed an inclination to reopen the matter and to support Foch's principle of conscription. Knowledge of this attitude was likely to strengthen Foch's delusion as to the greater issue. But he might have taken warning from several incidents.

On the 19th he was summoned with the other military advisers to a meeting of the statesmen who were discussing the clash between the Ukrainians and Poles at Lemberg. But when the question of the Polish frontier was brought up, President Wilson made prompt objection, saying that frontiers had nothing to do with soldiers. A few days later the Bolshevik movement in Hungary seized control of that country. Foch at once worked out a plan for dealing with the situation by military force, and urged that his plan should be executed forthwith. Clemenceau and Lloyd George listened rather dubiously. President Wilson's disapproval was more emphatic, and, after Foch had left, the "Council of Four" unanimously decided against military action.

On the 29th a fresh complication developed through the German Government's objection to Haller's Polish force being sent to Danzig on its way from France to Poland. Foch would have liked a drastic retort to their objection, but he was instructed to settle the question by meeting a German plenipotentiary at Spa. President Wilson concluded with the pointed remark: "And I would affectionately ask General Foch to act more as a diplomat than as a soldier." Henry Wilson's diary gives an amusing account of Foch's reaction: "The old boy's face was a study, and he put his hands up to his mouth and said in an audible whisper to me: '*Ce n'est pas commode, Henri!*'"

Foch utilised the opportunity given by this mission to raise a greater issue. Asking for guidance as to the line he should take at Spa, he also asked that his general views might be heard by the Council of Four. The hearing was granted, and on March 31st Foch came to it armed with a memorandum that dwelt principally upon the Rhine frontier, with a map on which to point his arguments. "I proved that only the Rhine could protect us against a mass invasion by seventy million Germans swelled by hordes of Slavs." "I tried to arrange my arguments in close, rapid succession, as if they were troops about to charge. I reasoned quickly and hotly. . . . I showed that, by abandoning the Rhine, France would in a measure commit suicide." "There is no principle by which a victorious nation can be forced to restore the means of her own security to her enemy. After a

free people has paid for her independence by more than a million and a half corpses and unparalleled devastation, no principle in the world can force her to live in perpetual fear of her neighbour, and to have alliances as her sole resources against disaster. No principle can prevail over a nation's right to existence or over the right of France and Belgium to secure independence."

"I concluded by saying: 'By renouncing the Rhine as a natural barrier, we should be conniving at an inconceivable, a monstrous situation. Germany would be able to continue her enterprises as though she had been victorious—the very Germany that has sent millions of human beings to death, the very Germany that planned to annihilate our country and leave her a heap of ashes, the very Germany that plotted to dominate the world by brute force—blood-stained, crime-stained Germany.'"

"I adjured the Allied Governments, who in their darkest hours had committed the care of their armies and the future of their cause to my hands, instantly to recognise that their future could be stabilised only by the Rhine as a military frontier and its occupation by the Allies." "I was at pains, as you see, to put great precision, logical force and fire into my reasoning. I believe that if those who listened to me had not been beyond conviction, I should indeed have persuaded them."

One may grant that Foch, true to his name, was not wanting in fire, while feeling that he overestimated his own precision and logical force. More rhetorical restraint might have strengthened his influence, if it could hardly have helped him to gain adherence to his principle. The atmosphere of March, 1919, was no longer that of March, 1918. According to Mordacq's evidence, President Wilson sat throughout the discourse with an impassive face, while Lloyd George, lying back in an arm-chair, appeared to be dozing. When Foch finished, Clemenceau said that he would have the discourse translated. His colleagues replied that it was unnecessary, as they quite understood Foch's views. Foch then left for Spa. Wilson saw him on his return: "He says Germans agreed to all his terms. They cried out about Bolshevism, but got no sympathy from Foch." That same day, April 6th, Foch wrote afresh to Clemenceau, saying: "As dis-

cussions between the heads of the Allied Governments progress, undertakings may be made which cannot afterwards be disowned. It therefore seems to me imperative that I should meet the French delegates in order to know the exact state of affairs." The demand irritated Clemenceau, who told Foch in reply to keep within his own sphere, although adding that when a provisional draft of the Treaty was settled Foch would be given the chance to explain his theories to the Cabinet.

On April 15th Foch wrote again, asking to be summoned before the Cabinet, and declaring his disapproval of any compromise. This time he received no answer. After waiting two days, he wrote to Poincaré, on whose sympathy he could count, asking the President to convene a meeting of the Cabinet or of the French delegates. This indirect effort was of no avail, and only increased Clemenceau's annoyance at Foch's persistent intrusions into policy. The sequel was that he more and more avoided consulting Foch or giving him information as to the negotiations. Further incidents aggravated the friction. A few days previously the Council of Four had decided upon the evacuation of Odessa. Foch regarded this as a breach of faith with the "white" Russians, and refused to transmit the order, saying that he could not understand it. In reply to Clemenceau's irate rebuke, Foch answered: "I will always act in that way. I shall never give my subordinates an order that I cannot understand myself." Growing angrier, Clemenceau declared: "Things cannot go on like this." Foch retorted: "You can do whatever you like." In the end Clemenceau himself had despatched the telegram. Foch's refusal would be followed by a second, that threatened graver consequences.

On April 17th Clemenceau notified Foch by telegram that the German delegates were to be invited to Versailles on the 25th to receive the text of the peace preliminaries, and instructed him to arrange for their journey. Foch refused to communicate the instructions to General Nudant, the French representative at Spa, saying that if Clemenceau wished the telegram to go, he could send it himself in his capacity of War Minister. Foch explained his refusal in a letter to Clemenceau: "The object of

the telegram was in contradiction to the promise made to me that I would be granted a hearing by the Cabinet. Besides, the terms of this telegram were obscure." The last sentence, of course, was merely an afterthought; one must add that the complaint is not borne out by the text of the telegram.

Foch's attitude caused a sensation among the Allied statesmen. He had already caused one upset by giving an interview to the *Daily Mail*, in which he spoke strongly against the treaty to which he feared they were trending. President Wilson and Lloyd George had at once made a vigorous protest to Clemenceau, who had asked Foch for an explanation. Foch disavowed responsibility; when told that one of his officers had even revised the proofs, he replied that the officer in question was away on a journey.* The explanation was unconvincing, and the incident did not ease the reception of the next. When President Wilson heard of Foch's refusal to pass on the instructions of the Conference he declared: "I will not entrust the American Army to a general who does not obey his Government."

Clemenceau thereupon went so far as to arrange for the nomination of Pétain to replace Foch as Allied Commander-in-Chief. But he deferred action. One obvious reason is the impression such a step would make on the public, especially in France, where Foch's uncompromising claim for the Rhine was certainly endorsed by the mass of the people. According to Clemenceau's evidence, after some days had elapsed "I was authorised by the Allies to continue Foch in his post if he promised on his honour not to behave in the same way again. He pledged himself to everything I asked of him."

If Clemenceau showed marked forbearance, whatever the cause, towards Foch during these wrangles, it was his own neglectful attitude that had provoked Foch to insubordination. It was often only through Wilson that Foch learnt of the progress of discussions and the proposals that were being made, even as regards the terms of occupation. Wilson's diary has several

* Presumably Foch had forgotten this denial when some years later he told M. Recouly, "I had merely given an interview to the *Daily Mail* to say what I thought of the treaty that was being prepared."

illuminating entries during this period—for example: “Two hours with Foch, who is more maddened than ever with the Frocks. He tells me that the Tiger never sees him nor tells him anything.” The tragedy of this cleavage between two ardent patriots was that, like all unspannable gulfs, it sprang from two equally strong convictions of right. Foch’s sense of his duty to *la patrie* was too strong on this occasion for his sense of duty as a soldier. Clemenceau’s desire to secure the best bargain for his country that was practically possible led him to withhold information even on points that were the soldiers’ concern. Apart from Clemenceau’s masterful temperament, one reason for his tendency to keep Foch in the dark would seem to have been the feeling that to discuss compromises with a man who would not consider them might only impede them.

On April 25th, however, Foch was given his chance to address the Cabinet and the French delegates. The Council of Four had now agreed on the main terms, although the treaty was not yet ready for presentation to the German delegates. Clemenceau’s demand for a thirty years’ occupation of the Rhineland had been overcome, on Lloyd George’s initiative, by the offer of an Anglo-American guarantee of immediate support to France in case of attack.

Foch began by saying that he must know the purport of the treaty before discussing it. Clemenceau replied that Foch was not called on to discuss it, but was merely being given a hearing for his views. Poincaré intervened to say that he understood the provisional draft had been communicated to Foch as a basis for his opinion. Clemenceau then said that he had not the right to disclose the draft, but would give a general idea of its contents. But he declared that he could not permit discussion of the treaty in Foch’s presence; otherwise he himself would withdraw. Foch then read out his original memorandum of January 10th, defining the military conditions which he regarded as essential in any such treaty. “I stressed the importance always attached by Moltke to the Rhine question. I summarised his principles thus: ‘Between Paris and Berlin the issue lies on the Rhine; whichever holds the river is certain of always dominating the

other.' " He next read out his memorandum of March 31st, concluding with the verdict : " There is only one remedy : the occupation of the Rhine."

Poincaré thereupon asked his opinion upon the Anglo-American offer of a defensive alliance. Foch replied : " A year must pass before England could send an army to France. . . . As for the American Army, it would need at least two years." He regarded such prospective alliances as " nebulous in the extreme " compared with " the solid reality of the guard on the Rhine." Poincaré's next question was whether the neutralisation of the left bank would compensate for the occupation of the river. " Such a guarantee is worthless." Foch added : " Our armies at present hold the barrier indispensable to our safety. To abandon it would be a crime against France." The Cabinet might be willing to take the responsibility ; he would not. When asked to define his conception of the occupation, he answered that the bridgeheads should be held " as long as was necessary and, in fact, until there was a state of affairs established in Germany reassuring as to her intentions." As a definition it was a trifle vague. He concluded by declaring in " emotional words " that he would never concur in the prospective treaty.

He then left, in company with the two delegates, Jules Cambon and André Tardieu, who were not Ministers. As he left, he declared : " We shall all be accused of treason because the nation will not understand that from our victory bankruptcy is likely to come." After he had left, the Cabinet decided unanimously in favour of the draft treaty. Poincaré sat silent.

Foch " was now determined to make a supreme effort before the plenary meeting of the Conference." On May 5th he wrote to Clemenceau, sending a similar letter to President Wilson and Lloyd George, and asked for a copy of the treaty in order that he, as Commander-in-Chief, should know the military provisions on which he might have to act. His request was granted, Lloyd George strongly supporting it. Foch really wanted to see the treaty as the basis for a fresh appeal. He then asked to be heard at a plenary meeting of the Conference. This request was also granted.

Next afternoon he launched his forlorn hope. "I tried to be brief, arresting, penetrating. I did not marshal my arguments, but smashed them out as I would have used my fists in a fight." Foch declared that a fifteen-year occupation of the Rhineland was "from the military point of view no guarantee; it will merely place a heavy strain on the Allied occupation." "The Rhineland question is controlled by the Rhine. . . . If we in this room had to defend ourselves, we should only have to hold the doors and the enemy could not enter. But if we lost our position at the doors, he could be among us. In the same way, so long as we hold the Rhine barrier we are absolute masters of the left bank at very little cost. If we relinquish the Rhine, on the other hand, we shall need many troops to defend a region where we cannot but be weak, as the enemy will be free to attack us whenever he wishes." "Notice particularly that I ask for an occupation of the Rhine, not the Rhineland. . . . I merely want the Rhine bridgeheads, which would need very few troops."

Foch did not explain how the communications of the bridgehead forces would be maintained through a potentially hostile country. There was also a lapse of logic in his suggestion that when the treaty was well on its way to fulfilment the conditions might be lightened in "the form of a smaller occupying force, not the occupation of less territory." Such an alleviation would hardly be felt as such by the people of the occupied country.

"I could not possibly have been clearer or more vigorous or have tried harder to sway them. Unhappily, I swayed no one; the game was lost before ever it began; every mind was decided in advance." "I made that last attempt from a sense of duty, and because I wished to show generations to come that I had no part in such a treaty."

After his vain, vocally heroic effort, Foch felt that, as a silent protest, he would stay away from the formal session next day when the draft treaty was to be handed to the German delegates. But after reflection and consultation with Weygand he changed his mind. "It seemed to me that when the Allies were all united before the enemy's representatives, the Commander-in-Chief of

their armies could not be absent. That was the reason that influenced me. A soldier's scruple."

He was also consoled, for the moment, by having registered his protest. Wilson notes that, after the session, "Foch telephoned to me . . . and told me all his impressions of our feebleness and Boches' truculence, and the ridiculous power we have given them of writing their objections. '*Soyez tranquille, Henri, c'est une affaire de wagons.*' And, of course, he is right. He was in great form, now that his opinion as to the necessity of the Rhine front has been recorded in yesterday's *Procs.*"

Foch also took any opportunity to deliver barbed thrusts at Ministers. To Klotz, the Finance Minister, he remarked: "With the treaty you have just signed, sir, you can expect with certainty to be paid with monkey tricks." Klotz cuttingly replied: "I am not in the habit of accepting such currency." "Well, you'll be obliged to take it."

The Germans replied to the draft treaty with well argued objections, pointing out both its inconsistencies and its far-reaching divergences from the pre-armistice basis of the Fourteen Points. Lloyd George, like many others, was impressed by their reasoning and quickened to fresh objection. He remarked that the time had come to choose between a "hell-peace" and a "heaven-peace." Urged on by most of the members of the British Empire delegation, he urged modifications and the reduction of the occupation to a mere eighteen months. But Clemenceau stood firm against any concession, threatening to withdraw from the Conference rather than yield even one day's occupation. The scales were turned against moderation by the action of President Wilson in rallying to Clemenceau's support at the sacrifice of the pledge given by his Fourteen Points. Wilson recognised the difference between the treaty and his ideal, but seemingly felt that a bad treaty was better than none, and that to retract might look like weakness. The treaty at least embodied the Covenant of the League, and once Europe was "out of the atmosphere of war . . . it would be easier to come to satisfactory solutions."

The burning question now was whether the Germans would accept the terms. Foch did not think so, but at first was confident in his power to make them. When shown the Peace Treaty he had told Clemenceau : " As it stands, I undertake to make the Germans accept it without a moment's hesitation. Make it ten, twenty, or a hundred times more rigorous, and I give you my oath that I will make them accept it as quickly. I guarantee that the Germans will sign it. They cannot avoid it." But he was then canvassing for more drastic terms. When he came to examine the military problem he seems to have lost some of his confidence and to have discovered difficulties in the way of compelling acceptance.

He had originally received instructions to be ready to march forward into Germany on May 27th, but the fresh controversy provoked by the German reply intervened. When this was settled, he was again told to arrange an advance, with Berlin as his objective. Considering so distant a bound neither practicable nor secure, he raised objections, much to the annoyance of the statesmen. On June 16th he was suddenly recalled from Luxembourg to a meeting of the Council of Four, and on arrival at President Wilson's residence was kept waiting. It seemed to him an example of the growing contempt with which he was being treated. After fuming impatiently for some time he walked out of the house. When the statesmen discovered his absence they were aghast at the insult to their own dignity, and sent for Henry Wilson to ask if he could throw light on the meaning of Foch's behaviour. They told Wilson that " if Foch would not carry out their wishes, they must get someone who would." Wilson, however, supported Foch's opinion as to the difficulties of a march to Berlin, with all the railways in German hands. And when Clemenceau consulted Pétain, Foch's destined successor, he received a similar verdict.

An informal council of war was held on the 20th, and Foch here " opened by describing his two bounds to the Weser, and then a halt, pending further reinforcements and separate armistices with Würtemberg, Baden, and Bavaria." He would reach the Weser in fifteen days. As his arguments against going further

than the Weser were endorsed by the other Allied generals, his plan was unwillingly accepted by the statesmen.

In later years his memory of this time of doubt seems to have faded, for he told M. Recouly : " We should only have had to press a button and give the signal to our troops, and the Allied armies, with full control of the Rhine and its tributaries, would hurl themselves onward to Berlin or Munich. In a few days we could dictate whatever peace terms we needed."

The Germans did not put his more limited plan to the test. Threat was more potent than fact might have been. They agreed to sign unconditionally, and the ceremony took place in the palace at Versailles on June 28th. Foch was not present. " On that day I took refuge in my headquarters at Kreuznach." The elation of victory was gone, and he was left with a sense of bitter regret. To hug the Rhine in his person was a poignant symbol of his unsatisfied desire for what might have been.

Chapter XXIV

THE REFLEXIVE YEARS

ON July 14th, the national fête day of France, came what to the world seemed Foch's hour of supreme bliss. That morning he rode at the head of the French and Allied troops under the Arc de Triomphe, opened for the passage of the Victory Procession. By that passage the shame of 1870 was expunged and the glory of the *Grand Armée* recreated, with a difference, the difference embodied in the men who marched behind Foch. He was too deeply imbued with the sense of the past not to feel the thrill of that hour of vindication. His pallor betrayed his emotion, and for a moment, indeed, he felt a touch of faintness, quickly resisted. He, above all, was singled out for acclaim as, clad in blue-grey service uniform, mounted on a black thoroughbred, he rode with simple dignity between the ranks of the applauding multitude. But few among them guessed the diversity of his emotions. Some, perhaps, may have ascribed his sombre mien not merely to soldierly repression of joy but to thought of those, including his only son, who had paid the cost of this triumphal march. The crowd, however, could not yet know the sense of frustration which for him marred this hour of deliverance and checked his natural exultation.

It was easier perhaps for him to forget, when, five days later, he rode through London in another Victory Procession, although on this visit likewise his tired, strained look attracted notice. But if it was to British policy that he chiefly ascribed his disappointment, it was against French statesmen that his main complaint was directed. And the warmth of his reception by the British public conveyed so strong a sense of war comradeship as temporarily to assuage the stings of peace. According to

Wilson, he "went off beaming after a wonderfully successful visit." Foch had even crowned it by a return to his old habit of exchanging headgear with Wilson, doubtless to the astonishment of an outwardly unmoved Grenadier Guardsman who, bringing a letter from Buckingham Palace to Foch's room at the Carlton Hotel, found the recipient in marshal's uniform surmounted by a too capacious "billy-cock" hat that almost engulfed his ears, while Wilson, in civilian dress, had a French *képi* perched on his head. Foch performed a more profoundly symbolical act on the day after the Victory Procession, when, going in solitude to High Mass at Westminster Cathedral, he paused and made a deep genuflection before the shrine of Joan of Arc, where serried candles shed their mystical radiance upon the Tricolour and Union Jack which conjointly hung above the figure of the Maid.

Ten days later Foch returned to London to receive from the King the baton of a British field-marshal that had been conferred upon him. He might have had a heavier reward, and his heart would have been lightened by it. "When the English were making grants to their admirals and generals, Lloyd George sent me a message by General Du Cane that he had suggested making one to me, but that Clemenceau had refused, saying: 'That is the business of the French Government.' I received the thanks of and congratulatory addresses from the House of Lords and the House of Commons." "The Americans, also, thought of making me a general of the United States, with pay. But discussing it with Briand—we were in London when the proposal was made to me—we agreed that I could not accept because of the English precedent. There has been no further question of anything."

The French Government seems to have felt that duty was its own reward, and that the modest emoluments of a Marshal of France, reduced by the fall of the franc, should satisfy all material wants. The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate had already, on November 11th, spent several minutes of their valuable time in voting the decree that "the armies and their leaders; the Government of the Republic; the citizen Georges Clemenceau, Prime Minister and Minister of War; Marshal Foch, generalis-

simo of the Allied armies, have deserved well of their country." It cost some money to engrave this decree on the school-walls of France. And in its simplicity it had a spiritual grandeur surpassing the cash wherewith Britain, by tradition, repaid her war leaders.

Foch appreciated the tribute thus engraved. He was too spiritually minded, too ardent a patriot to miss its significance. But while knowing that "man does not live by bread alone," he knew the value of bread. That instinct was deep-rooted in heredity, family and racial. When he heard that Rumania had granted General Berthelot an estate in recognition of his war services there, Foch remarked: "Good! Very good! That's a fine gesture! The Rumanians know how to be grateful. . . . A gift like that, a country's recognition of services done: that's worth all the titles of nobility in a family. One leaves one's children something to bear witness to what one has done. . . . An estate, or no matter what—something given in national gratitude: I should have liked that. . . . Gratitude is hard to carry. Democratic governments have no use for it. . . . They don't want to perpetuate anything. . . . And yet a house—some sort of hut, even—a national gift! . . . They turned to us in desperate straits. . . . And now!" His suggestion that any form of recognition would satisfy him equally does not ring true. For he had in abundance those trinket-symbols that other men covet, and that many covet above everything. He was a true Frenchman of the soil. His conclusion shows it. An acre of his own meant more to him than any decoration. It was the assurance of endurance, the patch of earth in which the soul could take root and bear seed.

But for Foch any personal grievances were submerged by his greater dissatisfaction over the omission to secure the Rhine frontier. As 1919 drew towards its close events seemed to be fulfilling his foreboding. The refusal of the American Congress to ratify the Peace Treaty, involving the lapse of the defensive pact, was greeted by him as quick justification for his original distrust of any intangible guarantee. He had, incidentally, been upset already by Pershing's firm resistance to his efforts to gain

a French foothold in the American bridgehead at Coblenz, a design inspired by the idea of fostering the Separatist movement and by the delusion that the population was French in sympathy. Pershing threatened to recommend the withdrawal of the American troops from the Rhine if Foch insisted. General Allen, the American commander at Coblenz, notes significantly in his diary of Foch's visit to Coblenz the following spring that, although otherwise genial, "he expressed no desire to see Pershing, when I told him he might come this year, nor did he request to be remembered to him."

The chief source of uneasiness for Foch, however, was the tardiness of the Germans in fulfilling the Peace Treaty. While convinced that they were evading the disarmament clauses, despite his unremitting supervision, he felt that the Allies were disarming themselves so fast that he was losing the power to compel German fulfilment. At the beginning of 1920 the Allied Governments set up the "Allied Military Committee of Versailles" as an organ to deal with the military side of the problem, its executive limbs being the military commission of control in Germany and the armies of occupation. Foch was appointed to preside over this committee. But its effect was really to curtail his powers, for he was merely president of a committee, and that committee was subordinate to a new higher organ of control—the Ambassadors' Conference.

Nevertheless, even though cramped by this diplomatic check, the task of supervising German disarmament proved less disappointing than the wider issues on which he was consulted. In January he laid before the Supreme Council a plan for forming an anti-Bolshevik combination of all the states from Finland to the Black Sea, but failed to carry conviction. This and other hesitations upon the part of the Allied statesmen in dealing with the European tangle led him to make the bitter comment: "They break everything, they crack everywhere." He declared that he could not carry on much longer with such men. Although Clemenceau had fallen from power, overturned by the general wave of discontent in France, Foch found still less satisfaction in the succeeding Government. His own solutions would have

been simple and forceful, and he could not understand why the statesmen did not apply them.

He summed up the San Remo Conference in April as "*la politique à deux sous*," which was with him a favourite expression of contempt. His characterisations of individual statesmen were equally caustic and vivid. Of one he remarked: "He's a coward in a rage"; of another: "He's a peacock; he has all its pride and futility!"; of a third: "He's an eel . . . he slips away like macaroni!" Poincaré was almost the only political name missing from Foch's catalogue of contempt.

He had shared Foch's views of the Peace Treaty, although he had shown more discretion in proclaiming it. But in February, 1920, when receiving Foch into membership of the French Academy, he said, with scarcely veiled meaning: "It was your task to make war; it was not for you to make the peace. You have, however, the right to say what form, in your opinion, the peace should take that it may best prevent the renewal of the war." "Let us hope that the world will never have cause to repent that it only followed your counsel incompletely." To Foch fell the academician's chair once occupied by Marshal Villars. And it was testimony to Foch's self-restraint that in pronouncing a eulogy of Villars he did not refer to the fact that to the victor of Denain was entrusted the task of negotiating the peace that closed the war of the Spanish Succession. Perhaps Foch felt that in such an assembly the point would be caught without emphasis, especially after Poincaré's words.

Foch always admired Poincaré. Yet even of this most unbending of statesmen Foch could complain, later: "He has no notion of the strength of his position in the country. I am constantly telling him that he can do what he wills. The essential is for him to will." Foch's regretful reflection may seem somewhat amusing to an historian of foreign relations.

For Lloyd George, Foch's feeling was mixed. In October, 1919, Foch replied to his birthday greetings: "I do not forget that it is to your insistence that I owe the post I now occupy"—much to Clemenceau's indignation. But a few months later Foch declared: "He changes his mind as easily as he changes his

shirt. More often if anything. Shirts can always be turned inside out." The further the war receded the more strongly Foch came to regard Lloyd George as the chief enemy of France. Two years later Foch would say: "I am greatly astonished that England allows . . . such a man, so devoid of all the qualities most appreciated by the English . . . to shape the destiny of so great a nation. . . . If he were given his own way he would drag England straight to Bolshevism. Not only England, but the whole of Europe."

The external danger from Bolshevism came to a head in July, 1920, when the Bolshevik armies took the offensive against the Poles, who had advanced far into Russian territory. The crisis developed while Foch was attending an Allied Conference at Spa. Foch had little belief in the cohesion of the newly created State or in its military power of resistance, but he opposed the suggestion that the Poles should be pressed to withdraw to their own frontier, arguing that such a retirement would ruin the morale of their Army. The retirement, however, soon took place—under the pressure of the Bolshevik armies. In forty days they would compel the Poles to retreat four hundred miles. At an Allied meeting on July 16th, Lloyd George asked if Foch would go out to Poland and steady the situation. Foch showed no eagerness to accept this vague rôle unless he had a free hand and full assurance that the Polish Government would fulfil his conditions. He considered that it was no use pouring arms into Poland unless and until real leadership was assured there. The French Prime Minister, Millerand, supported him, and Wilson argued that "it would never do to risk the priceless asset of Foch's name in a wild scheme of this sort." In the outcome Foch was sent by proxy.

For, when a few days later it was decided to despatch an Anglo-French Mission to Poland, Foch said to Millerand: "Send Weygand there first. He will do everything that I should do. . . . And later, if that is not enough, there will still be time for me to go myself." But in fact there would scarcely have been. By August 13th the Russian armies, pressing ceaselessly on, were at the gates of Warsaw, and its fall seemed certain. Weygand's

account of his reception by the Poles was calculated to deter Foch from coming. For although Weygand gradually penetrated the outer wall of prejudice with which the Polish leaders shut themselves off from Allied advice, he could make no impression on the central keep, Marshal Pilsudski, the Chief of the State.

This "sombre genius," to use Lord d'Abernon's description, had so strong a distrust of orthodox soldiers and methods that he virtually ignored the presence of the Allied Mission, saying that the only aid he desired was material supplies, not advice. Meantime he matured his plan in secrecy. Spreading out his troops rather than concentrating them, he deliberately exposed his vital points, and then left Warsaw, to lead a small picked force at hurtling pace across the rear of the exultant Russian armies. The swift and unexpected menace produced as sudden a collapse, and the Bolshevik armies flowed back from Warsaw in a disordered reflux.

If Weygand was, justly, disgusted with his treatment, Foch was contented with the result. For, as he was never tired of repeating, "results alone count." "I said, 'Send him and you will see!' And you have seen! We were the emergency repairers. Wherever things were going badly, in Italy, France, Poland, we went. We were familiar with desperate situations. Nothing is easier. We arrive, see what is required. We give orders. We take determined steps. We stick to them and succeed."

On the eve of the dramatic reversal at Warsaw Foch had accompanied Millerand to England, where he showed angry disgust at Lloyd George's efforts to arrange a truce between the Bolsheviks and the Poles, and apparent sympathy for the former. But when, in misplaced confidence, the Bolsheviks rejected Lloyd George's truce proposals, Foch was unable to suggest any counter-measures more effective than those of persuading the Baltic states to assist Poland and of sending some help to Wrangel's "white" army. This sense of powerlessness was the more trying because of his fear that the Bolsheviks, swamping Poland, would make contact with the Germans. Hence his relief when the Polish counterstroke turned the tide.

It enabled him to devote his attention more fully to the

Rhineland and the task of ensuring Germany's disarmament. Both the American and the British commanders in the occupied territory seem to have felt that his influence was exerted in favour of a too military attitude rather than in promoting the recovery of industry and a peaceful atmosphere. He, on the other hand, considered that his Allies were too prone to pander to those who had laid waste his own soil. Although his relations with Allen were smoother than with Pershing formerly, he remarked, shortly before the American withdrawal, that Allen "was acting under orders from Berlin."

Yet, although grieved by the policy of those who had fought alongside France in the war, Foch showed a fine capacity to distinguish between political and personal relations, and to remember the claims of comradeship when others were forgetting them. When, in the spring of 1921, the miners' strike threatened to spread, Wilson was forced to withdraw British battalions from the occupied and plebiscite areas abroad; Foch generously accepted the necessity, saying that as "Henri was in danger," he could withdraw whatever troops were needed for the emergency. Wilson's diary has the further note: "And he added that any mortal thing he could do to help me he would, and I had only to ask him. What a splendid old man he is, and what a loyal comrade!"

Foch's feeling towards England would seem to have been that of a paternal, and somewhat patronising, affection for a child that has gone astray. This attitude comes out especially in the record of a conversation later in the year with Wilson, who had been discoursing on and characteristically blackening Britain's troubles at home and abroad. Foch ever and anon exclaimed, "*Pauvre Angleterre, pauvre Angleterre,*" and then sadly declared: "You break your written word. You cower under the assassin and the Jew. Your friendship is no longer worth seeking. We must go elsewhere." This was certainly an extreme example of the frankness of a friend. It must be remembered that Foch's view of England was inevitably coloured by that of his Irish friend. They shared, too, a growing antipathy towards the Welsh Prime Minister, as well as the tendency of all politically-minded soldiers to regard all civil politicians as inherently base.

Towards the end of 1921, moreover, Foch was feeling the strain of his labours and disappointments. And that October he reached his seventieth birthday. A few weeks later he sailed on a visit to the United States at the invitation of the American Legion. Although he travelled far and wide during his two months' tour, the enthusiasm of his hosts counteracted the physical tax, and the trip served as a strong mental refreshment to him. Above all, his contact with the actively expressed desire to "get things done," by touching a sympathetic chord, acted as a rejuvenating gland. "Look at the young Americans; they are vigorous, physically and morally." "If they do not know, they learn, they make their way. One can only succeed by willing to."

He was impressed, too, by the American theory of government, which "combines the two essential principles of good government: authority and liberty." Satisfied that the principle underlying the constitution was sound, he did not pay much heed to suggestions that it did not work out impeccably in practice. His contact with America at home, together with his perception of its diversity in immensity, reacted on his own outlook. Henceforward his spirit of philosophical resignation would become more marked. "The conduct of nations is determined by deep-seated motives on which reasoning has no effect. They are as they are, as geographical and historical factors have formed them, and you will not change them. England can be explained by her insulated position; America by her isolation and her almost total ignorance of Continental affairs."

His deepened appreciation of this basic fact, following on his past experience, helped him to avoid the pitfall of propaganda. In dealing with Americans he remarked that if one attempted argumentative conversion "they will immediately become all prickles, like the hedgehog." "The best way of convincing them is to seem to avoid all efforts in that direction." He certainly showed discretion during his tour, if he did not fulfil his own advice to "be concrete," for he confined his addresses to an effulgent expression of gratitude, a general appeal for the continuation of war comradeship, and an exhortation to effort. He was careful to avoid any emphasis on his own chief effort, that towards

obtaining the Rhine frontier. Here his philosophy came to the aid of his restraint. It was no use wishing for, or willing, the unobtainable. "I uphold the Versailles Treaty. It is a minimum." Such bitterness as remained was reserved for those Frenchmen who had yielded in the struggle for the maximum. Thus, when Clemenceau followed him on a visit to America, Foch commented, in an interview given to the *New York Tribune*: "Clemenceau is going over there to whimper and sentimentalise like the old dotard he is. . . . Clemenceau has lost the peace. His apologia would have but little success in France; he is hoping to have more success with it in the United States. He is going over to say to the Americans: 'You are really very naughty. Why have you not ratified my treaty?' . . . If I could give him a piece of advice I would say to him, 'Stay at home!'"

The extension given to Foch's philosophy by his American holiday would be reflected in his forbearance towards the older Ally after his return. It was the more notable because it came at a time of increased friction, when most of his own countrymen reached the climax of irritation against Britain. Few of them would have shared his view in May, 1922: "I am very optimistic as to Franco-British relations. Men may commit foolish acts on both sides of the Channel, but the friendship, the union of the two peoples rest on foundations too solid for individual errors to shake them." When certain French statesmen referred acidly to Britain's attitude in their speeches, Foch's comment was: "What use are these oratorical manifestations? Platform diplomacy is bad diplomacy. Nations are set one against another. . . . And then nothing. . . ." On May 11th he met King George, who was visiting the war graves in France, and had come to lay a wreath in the French cemetery at Notre Dame de Lorette. The King was accompanied by Haig, whose post-war feelings towards Foch were known to be somewhat cold. It is reported that when the two exchanged greetings, the King took their clasped hands in his, and said: "Always good friends, is it not so?" Foch replied: "Always friends, Sire, for the same reasons and the same cause." Three months later Foch would give and receive fresh testimony of sympathy when he travelled

to attend the funeral of his murdered friend, Sir Henry Wilson.

A year later, at a time of even greater friction, Foch went to the unveiling of a memorial to the fallen at Abbeville, and there met Lord Cavan, Wilson's successor as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Taking Cavan's arm, and pointing to the memorial, Foch said: "Let us show our dead that we are united."

Foch's increased readiness to accept with equanimity the cross-currents of British and French policy may partly be traced to his satisfaction at the advent to power of Poincaré, who, he felt, would preserve French interests with the minimum of concession. And Britain's absence of support mattered less now that, in his opinion, Germany was "in a material and moral state that will not allow her to cherish, for a long time, the idea of a war of revenge. That is the essential point. Our security is assured for an indefinite period."

The one problem now, he considered, was to squeeze payment of reparations out of Germany. Towards her his attitude was unchanged and unrelenting. Germany, in his view, was the leopard that could not change its spots. When, in 1924, his old opponent Ludendorff was being tried at Munich for his share in Hitler's revolt, Foch found fresh support for his opinion in the account of the trial. "It throws a curious light on a horrible world of Boches outvying each other in betrayals and abuse. They remind me of a basketful of crabs biting and tearing each other limb from limb."

He doubted whether the Republic would endure, and, even if it did, whether it would "modify the German mentality." Germany, to him, was a body permeated with the "intellectual and ethical poison of a Prussian philosophy of superiority which absolved the powerful from conforming to morality." In default of the Rhine frontier, Germany's weakness seemed to him the one guarantee of France's security. Hence she ought to be kept weak.

But if his view of Germany was unchanging, his sense of what was practicable grew more sure as he grew older. He had learnt to answer his favourite question—" *De quoi s'agit-il?* "—in a spirit

of calculation, not of abandon. When, in 1922, Germany's failure to fulfil the reparation clauses led exasperated French politicians to suggest a march on Berlin, Foch pointed to the map, pointing out that the distance from the Rhine to Berlin was greater than from Paris to the Rhine. "Do you understand exactly what that means?" While he had no doubt of his ability to reach Berlin, he would need strong forces to guard his communications, and this would involve the calling up of two or three new classes in France. "Have you calculated the disastrous effect that this mobilisation would produce in our country, which has already suffered fifty-two months of war?" What impression would it make in England, America, and all the neutral countries which "already suspect us of a Chauvinistic and imperialistic spirit"? And even when Berlin was occupied, "what concrete advantages would you reap?" The German Government would probably imitate, even though in a modified form, the example of the Russians in 1812. "Are we to renew Napoleon's errors and follies?" His arguments quenched such dreams.

But at the end of 1922 Germany's statement of inability to fulfil her immediate obligations gave an impetus to the French idea of seizing "productive pledges." When the Reparations Commission, against the vote of the British member, declared Germany in voluntary default over her coal and timber deliveries, Poincaré's Government decided to apply the sanctions provided for in the treaty and occupy the Ruhr. Although Foch had no moral objections to this step, he questioned the practical value and necessity of occupying the whole district. His own plan, framed in November, had been to occupy a more limited strip as far as Essen, sufficient to yield the coal that was required. "The Government wanted to swallow everything at one gulp. Consequently we choked and could not digest it."

Nevertheless, although concerned at the Government's precipitation, he had been for a time more optimistic than the result warranted. When difficulties began, Weygand was despatched to the Ruhr by the Government. Foch commented: "Good! Once more we are sent to patch up things." And a few days later he remarked: "The battle is ended." But in fact it was

not. His doubts had been based on the material and military difficulties of such an enlarged occupation. These were soon overcome. But the real difficulty would be moral—the passive resistance offered by the German mining population supported by their Government. The limitations of force were exposed. If resistance was ultimately broken down after a grim eight months' struggle, through the exhaustion of German finances, the outward success was bought at a tremendous cost, to France as well as to Germany. The collapse of the mark would be followed by the fall of the franc, while France would not enjoy the redeeming advantages which Germany gained by going into bankruptcy.

Foch ascribed these consequences to lack of any clear plan applied consistently. The politicians were unequal to their task, but their inadequacy was the fruit of the political system. In his opinion, the crux of the problem lay in a reform of the constitution so as to ensure more continuity of office, and to dissociate administration as far as possible from the fluctuations of politics. Yet, as an observer of the falling franc, his faith was as characteristic and unshaken as during the war. "Unless we are cowards or lunatics, the franc can never suffer the fate of the mark." He trusted to will and counted on work, pointing to the high proportion of Frenchmen who had a stake in the soil and to the fact that France was self-sufficing. His faith would be justified.

But he would continue to insist on the need for a new constitutional foundation, and of building policy on a settled theory adapted to the new conditions of Europe. "We are building on old foundations. It is like fixing an engine on to a stage-coach. You will not make a motor-car in that way."

By 1926 he was even holding up Germany as an object-lesson to the politicians, and telling Briand: "Germany will soon teach France how a country can progress with a republican constitution. The lesson is unexpected and paradoxical, but I assure you that it will be given." But his growing respect for the German Republic, and his inclination to believe that for the present its aim was economic rather than military, did not weaken his conviction that Germany would again be a menace.

His scepticism towards the League of Nations was unchanged, and he lost few chances of ridiculing the debates at Geneva. Towards the Locarno pacts he was more tolerant. "They allow Europe to enjoy a lull, and above all, they give the young nations, born of our victory, time to consolidate themselves."

He often spoke ardently of peace. "No one wants any longer this abominable thing which the war was." "No more wars; it is too dreadful." But his idea of ensuring peace was unalterably based on military guarantees. "I am on the side of the peace-makers, but not of the pacifists." "We must foresee and make preparations for the moment when we evacuate the Rhine." One step on which he insisted was that "of providing powerful fortifications" along the frontier to replace the natural obstacles which did not exist. But a greater assurance would be by the union of potential forces. He had been compelled to forgo the frontier which he desired; in default of it he would do all in his power to enclose the one country of potential menace with a ring fence of armies allied to France. Hence the visits which he paid to the countries of the Little Entente, and the paternal eye with which he watched their consolidation. "Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, and Yugo-Slavia. . . . You will be astonished by their development and progress. Only they must have time and peace."

"Poland? In 1918 I had declared that it was a myth. . . . I have now entirely changed my mind. It is a nation which has a vitality and a strength which I admire. They have been able to drive the Germans out of their country, from Posnania, absolutely and completely. And then they have children, swarms of children." The Czech nation, too, had given sure proof of its force and vitality. It had found good leaders and had shown "the great wisdom to leave them continuously in power." "A nation capable of such orderliness can certainly hope for a great destiny."

Closer ties with France's new allies, the preservation as far as possible of the ties with her old allies—these ideas formed the main planks of Foch's platform. They rested on the idea of keeping Germany permanently powerless. He would have felt more secure if the frontiers of the new countries had been

"determined by considerations of strategy." They were too irregular and intertwined with each other. Some people might think that this vulnerability would make for hesitation in risking war; he felt that only a strong barrier could shelter the spirit of peace from withering gusts. What a pity that "there were more politicians than generals on the council that remodelled Europe"!

As the years passed he had more time to reflect on policy, because he had less to do. But his routine was unvarying, save during his decreasingly frequent absences from Paris. At half-past nine each morning he would arrive at his office, 8 bis, Boulevard des Invalides, one of the long, low-built annexes which flank the great dome of Napoleon's resting-place. Punctuality was still so firm a trait that if delayed in arrival or leaving early he would almost apologetically explain the reason. A crisp greeting to his two aides-de-camp, and he would pass into his large, barely furnished room, its walls covered with maps and ornamented only by the flag he had borne as Allied Commander-in-Chief. A pause in front of the barometer after hanging up his hat and cloak, in winter also a glance at the thermometer, and then a quick step to his table, where books and files formed a barricade round the large blotting-pad, beside which stood in orderly array his working materials—pens, pencils, pipes, and paper packet of tobacco. Before looking at the neatly stacked letters, he would wipe his nickel-plated eyeglasses, which hung by a black thread. He opened all his letters himself. After reading a few lines, he would glance at the signature before scanning the letter for its real point. If they were merely baits for an autograph: "Do we know him? No! To the waste-paper basket!" If they opened with magniloquent flattery: "Boum! Boum! Here comes the big drum!" If they came from associations of ex-service men they received specially sympathetic attention and a ready response unless they wanted something more than the patronage of his name. In that case: "If we once begin to do this, we shall never be able to stop."

His orderly officers stand close on his right, taught by experience to be careful in catching the exact indications of how he wishes each reply to be phrased. "What's this? 'I have taken

great interest in reading this book !' No, no ! I have not read it. Always tell the truth. Write, please, 'I expect to find great interest in reading it.' " Another letter might contain a request that he would write a preface : " Prefaces ? They bore me ! " is his usual comment. When he wrote one for the published diaries for Sir Henry Wilson, he spent weeks on the task. For his habit of polishing and repolishing grew more intense as he grew older. And it formed a curious contrast to his speech, so disjointed and yet so pointed. " Perhaps I did say that. It is more or less what I think. But, if I had to put my signature to it, I should insist on revising it. . . . It is only what I put in writing that counts." The historian will demur. For a Foch portrayed through his written words would be as lifeless and as opaque as his own death-mask.

His letters at last dealt with, the orderly officers would be released by the set phrase : " Tell General Weygand that I am in." With Weygand's entry, bearing the official correspondence, discussion of the more serious problems would begin. Despite the intimacy between the two, Weygand always maintained an air of disciplined subordination, continuing to stand even when Foch left his desk to lean back on the sofa, pipe in mouth, and putting forward deferentially the analysis of the problem he had already made.

After Weygand would come those for whom appointments had been arranged, the daily drops that made up a stream of visitors as diverse as it was distinguished. Then, punctually at ten minutes past twelve, Foch would leave, by car if some ceremony had called on him to don uniform, but usually on foot. The short walk to his home in the Rue de Grenelle was always a pleasure, and as an exercise the more vigorous because of his tendency to dive across the street at a run through a gap in the traffic. Another form of exercise came from the constant need to answer salutes, for, despite his civilian clothes, relieved only by the buttonhole ribbon of the Military Medal, he was constantly recognised.

The ordeal was light, however, compared with the ceremonial duties that filled the post-war years. These were the inevitable

penalty of the unique pinnacle of fame and position that he had attained. "I am a mere parcel. I let them pack me up. They exhibit me, then store me away again. I do not concern myself with anything." He was too much a soldier, too strongly imbued with the sense of such duty, to shirk the requirements of serving as puppet-in-chief at endless reviews, medal presentations, unveilings, and receptions. Happily for him, repetition did not dull his inward response to the thrill of mass enthusiasm, even though his features donned automatically a martial cloak of immobility. And in unveiling a war memorial or presenting a decoration for valour his emotion could still find renewal because, as he said: "I live in the memory of a past which is always present to my eyes."

This was the more inevitable because his house in the Rue de Grenelle, assigned to him as a residence by the Government, was a museum in miniature, crowded with war trophies and commemorative tributes from French cities and Allied countries. The eye of the reflecting visitor might rest on certain medals representing Louis XIV at the conquest of the Rhine; on paintings of the Cathedrals of Laon and Reims, suggestive of Foch's consciousness of fighting to guard not only his country but his religion; on the resplendent gifts of kings intermixed with bourgeois heirlooms that had once decorated his childhood home at Valentine. His bookcases also, none too spacious, had their tale to tell: with Thiers' *Consulate and the Empire* still holding a place of prominence; with much annotated volumes of Clausewitz, Bernhardi and Moltke's correspondence; with sufficient volumes of plays as to suggest Foch's fondness for the theatre; with a marked absence of novels and poetry. The observer could note a fair proportion of the French classics, Corneille the most thumbed, and some translations from the English; but German and Scandinavian literature Foch found "disquieting and nebulous." As for the history of the war, Foch preferred to contemplate it in the trophies which surrounded him rather than in literary records.

Foch found more change and more relief from the memory of the past when he went to Treufeunteuniou, where he spent his

holidays surrounded by his seven young grandchildren. Part of the time he worked at his *Memoirs*, striving after a laborious exactitude of phrase which partly accounts for his failure to complete them, and for their inexactitude as history. If he had spent more time in pursuing facts, and less in polishing phrases, his narrative might have attained greater precision and truer proportion. He also lacked time, however, because in his last lap of life he turned to write a study of Joan of Arc—a task of more appeal to him than research into contemporary records. The subject was made for him, and he for the subject. Instead of a dull exploration of facts, it could be explained by an inward light.

But it was not to literary labours that he devoted most of his time, nor in them that he found most satisfaction. Even in the mornings he would break off to walk round his small estate, pruning-scissors in hand, and in nothing did he find such true contentment. When asked by friends in Paris how he spent his time at Treufeunteuniou he answered: "I plan strategy with my trees." There, in another form, he could repeat his action at Ypres, looking for spots where trees might be planted to bar the path of the wind-gusts that blew from the nearby sea. For many years shooting had been his chief recreation and delight, but he had now given it up: "Peace to the partridges!" Constructive effort, the satisfaction of doing something that should endure, such was now his absorbing thought. It became all the stronger after his visit to Morocco, and in paying tribute to Lyautey's work he showed a noble envy. If he himself had helped to preserve old France, Lyautey was creating a new France. "Ah! If I were twenty I would go to Morocco; there is something there to work for. . . . If I had my life to live all over again, I should not trouble about words, I should go where the deeds are done, and you would see the results." On his small estate in Brittany he could at least aim to be a Lyautey in miniature, so that in his last lap of life he might leave seed in the soil. "I should like to leave, after my death, things that are solid and enduring." Hence his passion for trees, mystically intensified because to him they instinctively suggested the vaulting pillars of a Gothic cathedral.

His arboricultural passion expressed itself characteristically in the form that gave most outlet for his urge to vigorous action. Weygand, who after the war had bought a house close by, once remarked with affectionate humour: "As soon as the Marshal arrives he grabs his pruning-scissors and mercilessly cuts off all that is 'pruneable.' When there is nothing left to cut, he goes away."

But every August Foch broke off his holiday and went away for another cause—to make his annual pilgrimage to the Belgian frontier. There he would uncover and kneel in prayer, motionless save for a shaking of the head, before a wooden cross that bore the legend: "Germain Foch, Subaltern of the 131st Infantry, killed at Gorcy, August 22nd, 1914." In that grave his own name was buried. But at Treufeunteuniou, whence he had come, there was a sevenfold guarantee that his seed would endure.

His own strength was failing, the brave heart flagging. He had already suffered warnings when, in January, 1928, after going to Nice to unveil a memorial, news came of Haig's sudden death. Unhesitatingly, he abandoned his intention to rest a while in the Riviera sunshine, and set out on the long journey to London. A bad crossing was followed by the strain of the funeral ceremonies. On his return Foch showed the effects. In July he went to the unveiling by Poincaré of his own statue on the hill of Cassel. His tiredness was noticeable; his skin had a leaden tinge. In November at the unveiling of the Marne memorial his failing health was as marked as his unfaltering spirit.

Then, in the night of January 13th, 1929, he was stricken by a heart attack. His doctors were relieved when dawn came and found him still alive. The crisis was the beginning of a two months' battle, a struggle so prolonged as to be reminiscent of the type of war which he had waged. And in this last battle the power of his will was greater than ever before. Complications intervened, but he fought through them, was felled anew only to recover afresh. He gained ground so far as to leave his bed. If he fought so hard for life, it was not from fear of death. "It has to be faced some day. The chief thing is to be prepared for it. One should not be alarmed by the thought of it." He was ready to go, but would not go as if yielding.

On March 20th he spent part of the day in his chair. As the winter sun was sinking and he was about to return to bed, a fresh heart attack struck him. His characteristic remark "*Allons-y !*" this time sounded as a trumpet-call for his last charge. Other men might surrender to death; he would launch himself into its arms with colours flying.

On Palm Sunday, three days later, his body was carried to lie alongside the "Unknown Soldier" beneath the Arc de Triomphe. At evening it was borne to Notre Dame. On the Tuesday it was laid in a vault beside Napoleon's grave under the great dome of the Invalides. There most appropriately the mind as well as the body of Foch might rest. But the spirit of Foch had gone to mount guard over the humbler shrines of the Maid.

Epilogue

IN the enthusiasm of victory the name of Ferdinand Foch was inscribed on the brief roll of the Great Captains of history. Will it remain there? Or will it be erased by the friction of facts gradually collected and collated in the service of history? The answer will depend not merely on the resistance which a man's reputation offers to these hard rubs, but on the question whether truth can overtake the swiftly writing hand of legend—the supreme duplicator.

Here it is for us only to discuss the first condition, and to trace the outlines of the historical Foch. That it does not fit the outlines of the pre-Napoleonic Great Captains is obvious. They were essentially men who by their art multiplied the effect of slender resources. They gained their ends through ruse and stratagem executed with a finesse that Foch the professor was far from holding up to admiration. And those ends were gained in a type of war that Foch as the pupil of Clausewitz despised the more because he unhistorically assumed it to be utterly different, not merely from the modern condition but from the eternal ideal.

It is thus with Napoleon alone—as Foch would have wished—that his practice may be compared. In the first flush of rapture over the stubborn enemy's collapse Foch was hailed not only as almost the peer of Napoleon but as his double. It was proclaimed that Foch had reproduced in a modern setting the strategic method of Napoleon. In the cold, clear light of history the differences are seen to be more marked than the similarities.

The difference in conditions formed a primary hindrance to any reproduction. For the weight of numbers and the artificial power of defence cramped manœuvre and obstructed those

dazzling combinations in time and space which are the life-blood of Napoleon's art, clogging the arteries worse than in Napoleon's own later campaigns. It is true that the mechanical mobility brought by the advent of the railway and the road-motor helped to restore the circulation, but it helped the defending side even more in repairing the consequences of a local collapse. In these conditions something more was needed to offset and upset the superiority which defence had gained by the development of field fortification and the machine-gun.

That supplementary key might have been obtained by study of the great Captains preceding Napoleon. For they had waged war in an era when the defensive had the ascendancy, and when offensive manoeuvre was cramped both by the strength of defensive aids and by the dependence of armies on an elaborate system of supply. The difference between their warfare and Napoleonic warfare was due not—as Foch in his simplicity imagined—to a deficiency of will among them, but to a surplus of obstacles in their path. If they overcame such obstacles sooner and more effectively than did Foch in 1914-18 it was by their ceaseless research for surprise and by their skill in creating opportunities through a deceptive yielding which lured their opponents into pitfalls. They had not measured success in acreage nor counted as irretrievable shame the purposeful abandonment of “a yard of ground.”

Even more than in their wars, the successful moves of 1914-18 would take a defensive-offensive form, and be the product of a riposte following upon a relapse. Yet that form was unpremeditated and undesired, and the advantage, paradoxically, provided in spite of the generals. Where the Great Captains had bent conditions to their advantage, their professional successors did no more than seize opportunities, sometimes.

A growing opportunism is certainly the mark of Foch, as it has been of many famous generals who have learnt by hard experience to discard pedantic “principles,” and thereby have come through tribulation to a triumphal issue. In Foch this opportunism is the more noteworthy, as well as the more creditable, because of the fixity of his original theory and because he

had so long been a professor. What a gulf there was between his pre-war conception of "a single supreme stroke on one point" and his post-war declaration that "Victory is won by bits and scraps"! In bridging it he was helped by a philosophy expressed by the phrase he often quoted: "*A chaque jour suffit sa peine.*" First applied by him in human relations, the proof of its value there, coupled with the rebuffs to his theory of war, led him to apply it more and more to military problems.

Thus was evolved the strategic method of the war's final phase—a method whose virtue lay in a looseness which gave free rein to opportunism. It is loosely defined, and so best expressed, in a congratulatory letter which Foch wrote to Haig on August 26, 1918: "It is this persistent widening and intensifying of the offensive—this pushing vigorously forward on carefully chosen objectives without excessive regard to alignment or close touch—that will give us the best results with the smallest losses, as you have so perfectly understood." The historical analysis of the last "Hundred Days" may have suggested that Foch did not perfectly understand the implication of his new method; that the lingering pressure of the old theory on his mind was apt to tighten his application of the new method. But his thought had travelled far in coming back so far from the idea of single-minded and single-pointed concentration.

That retrogression to wisdom continued when the war was over. For it was Foch himself who delivered the comment: "We experienced some unhappy surprises at the very beginning of hostilities. We had stepped into a hornets' nest, as the saying goes. We then believed that morale alone counted, which is an infantile notion. Only a very primitive sense of strategy would hold that an immediate and thorough attack is the one means of beating the enemy. . . . You concentrate on breaking the line, on the effectiveness of a direct and violent blow—but you never *do* break through. You merely penetrate the surface. Another immediately forms. You will not get results from a single attack—which by itself can do nothing—but from a well-planned, well-executed, well-placed series." If Foch did not identify his share in the original theory, his verdict was none the less a confession.

His habit of speaking in images, of demonstrating his meaning by gestures, was the cast of his mind. It was truly said of him that "when he thinks he sees." And with equal truth it can be said of him that he only thought what he could see. Hence it was only by experience that he could learn and only through experience that he modified the picture stamped on his mind by authority during his military adolescence.

Here is a further contrast between Napoleon and Foch: the one came at twenty-six to try a theory born of reason out of a critical mind. The other had to wait until sixty-two to test a theory received from authority in a spirit of faith. Napoleon at St. Helena would confess that he had learnt nothing from twenty years of war that he had not originally known. A comparison of his early with his later campaigns confirms his confession. But it also suggests that experience had clouded the clearness of his original vision. If he forgot more than Foch ever knew, he forgot, whereas Foch learned. The difference may be traced in the last "Hundred Days" of the two men's career in command.

Foch's handicap was that he had to forget so much before he could learn. And the end of his opportunity came before the lesson was complete. He had come to perceive that the single stroke must be replaced by the serial, that concentration must be endowed with variety, that compromise was as inevitable in strategy as in policy. Here the experience of dealing with allies helped him in dealing with the enemy. From his experience he drew the deduction that "it is necessary when one has been repulsed for from four to five days, not to change one's objectives but to give them a new form in the guise of a new operation. Only at this price will you get obedience from men. With his natural *élan* the French soldier, who loves variety, accepts the idea which appears new to him."

The conclusion reveals the extent of Foch's change of outlook, but also its limits. The purpose of variation is not merely to obtain obedience from one's own men but to deprive the opposing commander of the power to frustrate their fulfilment of the order to go forward. And a far-sighted commander does not

accept such repeated repulse before introducing a change. Rather does he, in Sherman's famous phrase, aim from the outset to fix the opponent "on the horns of a dilemma."

The deeper truth to which Foch did not penetrate fully is that in war every problem, and every principle, is a duality. Like a coin, it has two faces. Hence the need for compromise as a means to reconciliation. This is the natural consequence of the fact that war is an affair of two parties, so imposing the elemental necessity that while hitting one must guard. Its corollary is that, in order to hit with effect, the enemy must be taken off his guard. Effective concentration can only be obtained when the opposing forces are dispersed; and in order to ensure this, one's own forces must be widely distributed. Thus, by an outward paradox, true concentration is the fruit of dispersion. Napoleon realised this when he spoke of holding his army "*réunie*"—although his successors misinterpreted the word as meaning that the army should be massed in a solid block. For, in fact, he distributed his army in a loose grouping, like a wide-flung net, to baffle and entrap his opponent—the army was assembled in potentiality but not in physical contact. To strike with strong effect one must strike at weakness. To destroy the bulk of the enemy's force one must destroy it by fragments. To ensure reaching an objective one must have alternative objectives. An attack that converges on one point must threaten, and be able, to diverge on another. To fulfil a plan, that plan must have branches. Napoleon's "*faire son thème en deux façons*" goes to the root of the matter.

In Foch's progress through experience towards this conception of duality in war he suffered inevitable checks from his preconceptions and his instincts. Hence the frequent contradictions which mark both his utterances and his actions, making him, for all his seeming simplicity, so hard to gauge. By one selection he could be made to appear the wisest of men; by another the most obtuse. The reconciliation of duality is as difficult in Foch as in war. The man who spoke of "no prepossessions" could in the same breath declare that the theory he taught "would not be open to discussion." The man who condemned Moltke

for preconceptions was to prove still more subject to them. So, in later years, he would declare, "You all know how I hate blinkers. One must not have an exclusively military outlook"—and yet scornfully dismiss all that touched upon politics or literature with the retort: "Leave that alone; it is not in my province." Or again, he could proclaim the importance of being receptive to new ideas, and yet be known to reject them when proffered with the sweeping phrase and gesture: "I will not have anyone thrusting ideas upon me!"

Most influential with his words, Foch valued only deeds. Dealing always in generalities, he constantly insisted on the need to analyse facts. "The facts exist. You must see them. They continue to exist. You will not eliminate them by sentiment. . . . One must be a realist." Yet at another moment he would define his own attitude thus: "Of intention, I always look at the side of success and not of check; I turn my back on the possibilities of disaster, I eliminate the hypothesis of failure." But he often failed to eliminate the fact.

How can we reconcile such a bundle of contradictions? Intellectually it is not possible. Spiritually, it is. We come closest to the truth, and so did Foch, in his remark: "Intellect, criticism—pah! A donkey who has character is more useful." The verdict has the ring of truth, but shows only one face of the coin. Yet in its one-sidedness it is fully true of Foch, and thereby provides yet another contrast between him and Napoleon. For was it not Napoleon who scornfully said of his British foes—the foes who had foiled him—that theirs was an army of lions led by donkeys? Might the criticism have been repeated a century later when that army was led by a Marshal of France? It is at least certain that Napoleon, who so carefully studied all hypotheses, would have been aghast at a strategist who wilfully closed his eyes to any unfavourable hypothesis.

But we should not forget that under such leadership a bid for world-domination was once more foiled. If the cost might have been less, the result at least could not have been more definite. It is possible, even probable, that with more intellect in leadership, victory would have been cheaper. But with less

character, defeat would have been more probable than victory. And of that undefeatable character Foch was not only the symbol but the stimulant.

With more exclusive truth than he perhaps intended, Commandant Bugnet has said of Foch that "character was his genius." His was not the character of a strategist. For strategy is primarily intellectual; it demands the examination of both faces of the coin and the calculation of odds. His was not even the character of a commander in the Napoleonic sense. For Foch did not exercise command. If he gained the title of Commander-in-Chief, he still in reality remained the co-ordinator. In a singularly clear-sighted mood of reflection he himself later remarked: "I was no more than conductor of an orchestra. . . . A vast orchestra of course . . . say if you like that I beat time well!" The modesty of the description does him the more honour because it exactly fitted the facts. And the metaphor suited him so well that he applied it to his ultimate strategic method: "Has the music stopped? Are we tired of the tune? We must start a new one. Never stop." "The true meaning of the unified command is not to give orders, but to make suggestions. . . . One talks, one discusses, one persuades. . . . One says: 'That is what should be done; it is simple; it is only necessary to will it.'"

If he preferred to persuade rather than to command, it was not only by force of circumstances but by personal inclination, an inclination developed by his professorial experience. But he was the professor of the platform rather than of the laboratory or the seminar. He dealt in images more than in arguments, and appealed to the spirit more than to the reason. In the circumstances it was perhaps the more effective course, for the influence of reason is apt to be crippled during a crisis. A spiritual appeal could more easily jump the barrier of language and the crevasse of sectional interests.

For the task of conductor of the Allied orchestra Foch was fitted not only by his manner, but by his magnetism. If he lacked Napoleon's magnetic power of mass appeal, he replaced it by a gift of personal appeal, a chamber magnetism, which fitted the conditions of command in 1914-18. He emanated authority,

if he did not exercise it. Above all he radiated the suggestion of success. After hearing his phrases quoted an eminent neurologist once declared: "The discipline of Foch appears to me a true method of psychotherapy which ought to be applied to the education of children and to the treatment of the sick." This is a perfect valuation of Foch and his influence on the war. For in the crisis of war men are apt to become children even if they do not become nervous invalids. And the further they are behind the front, the greater is their predisposition to this condition. Foch became during the war what Coué became after it. The likeness is strengthened by Foch's habit of reiterating simple formulas of suggestion, and is not weakened by his emphasis on will in apparent contrast to Coué. For although Foch spoke continually of the conscious application of will, it is clear that his real suggestion was a subconscious exercise of faith. His will rested on his faith.

In this power of what he termed "will" lies the only comparison between Foch and Napoleon. Yet there is, strictly, no comparison. For Foch excelled Napoleon in this quality just as he was otherwise surpassed in mental qualities. While Napoleon trusted to his star, Foch trusted to his God. "One speaks of genius. Bah! genius doesn't count . . . in the hour of decision, when it became necessary to say the 'yes' on which thousands of lives depended, I was, *and I felt it*, the instrument of the divine Providence."

Because of that self-attested source of Foch's inspiration, no less than because of the nature of his influence, the real comparison of Foch is not with the "Corsican brigand" but with the Maid of Orleans. Each was the symbol and standard-bearer of a great recovery. Each rode on the crest of a wave which swept the invader out of their country. Both were conscious of an impulse that transcended reason. Both had a native shrewdness underlying their devoutness. In the one difference, apart from sex, rests the supreme coincidence—and atonement. For the heirs of the first invader served as the instrument in repelling the second invasion. The Man of Orleans thus, in a dual sense, obtained requittal for what the Maid of Orleans had suffered.

But there were other parallels. If the first *Revanche* was inspired by the spirit of the Maid, it was projected through the muzzles of the primitive cannon with which the French shattered the palisade defences of the hitherto secure British archers. Faith may ignore, but reason cannot, the historical importance of this material factor. So in the second *Revanche*, the advent of the primitive tank had a similar effect. There was much truth in General von Zwiel's statement: "It was not the genius of Marshal Foch that defeated us, but General Tank." Foch himself came to recognise the interdependence of moral and material factors. Admitting the folly of the pre-war belief that "morale alone mattered," he said: "War is in itself only a matter of maintaining harmonious proportion between the spiritual and material elements. Fundamentally that is so. If no such proportion is attained, however excellent an army may be it can do nothing against its adversary."

Even so, he omitted to mention the mental element. It is this which ensures the harmonious proportion between the spiritual and material elements. To its deficiency may be traced the duration and cost of the war. But it is none the less true that the spirit of Marshal Foch and the body of General Tank were alike necessary for victory.

Strategically, Foch was most handicapped because he was too single-minded. He had derived this outlook from Clausewitz, if the tendency was inherent in his religious spirit. Gradually, experience brought him to perceive the duality inherent in war, and the consequence was seen not only in his approval of the supplementary Balkan moves but in his own development of alternate blows. Even so, his tendency to press each too long and his reluctance to devise alternatives are proof that his vision was dim.

Spiritually, Foch's single-mindedness was his strength. Because men in war are irrational, because in time of fear they prefer false assurance to disturbing fact, Foch could exert this strength to valuable effect. Although he suffered from delusions, those delusions brought gain as well as loss to others. While his power of self-delusion caused the sacrifice of lives, his power in deluding

others helped to prevent the sacrifice of nations. In the council of war as in the classroom he was convincing because he was passionately convinced. The more general he was, the better his effect as a general, and the less harm he caused to offset his heartening influence. The higher he rose, the easier was it for him to preserve this air of indefinite confidence—and indefiniteness was always natural to him.

Its supreme vindication came in the spring of 1918. Beneath the surface the seeds of destiny were approaching fruition—with the inevitable increment of America's resources and the exhaustion of Germany's. But when spring came the green shoots could not be seen. They would ultimately determine the issue. But, in surviving the crisis, faith counted for more than facts. Only by faith could the reapers endure until the harvest was ripe.

During those dark days the faith of Foch was influential; but the faith in Foch was vital. The man himself was above all a medium—the medium through whom the promise of salvation came. Historical analysis may show, does show, that the Supreme Command was little more than a name. At the time, however, men believed it to be a reality. Especially those who mattered most—the men who fought.

The Allied higher commanders might soon discern the limitations of a Supreme Command among equal nations; the statesmen might be disillusioned as to the potency of their own panacea. But as the fighting troops assumed it to be a reality, its effect on them was real. That effect was perhaps greatest where it was most needed—in the hard-trying British Army, which bore the first and heaviest shocks.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that the news of Foch's appointment had a direct effect on the men in the ranks, for the names of their higher commanders rarely meant much to them, even when known to them, in the war of military mass production that was waged on the Western Front. But the news had an unmistakable effect on the regimental officers, most of them quondam civilians. Too remote from the brain-cells of the military hierarchy for true discrimination or exact analysis, their judgment was guided by the sum of general impressions, personal

experiences, and concrete results. More ready than the average regular to see the best in their superiors, to exalt any capable commander to the level of a Great Captain, they were slow to renew a confidence once forfeited. Many of them had lost faith in their own higher leadership after Passchendaele and the Cambrai "boomerang." In such a mood the reverses of the spring tended to act as a confirmation of mistrust.

By contrast, the idea that a fresh and superior authority had taken charge was a restorative in itself, while the name of Foch was sufficiently known, if chiefly through the echoes of the Marne legend, to have a heartening sound. The fresh confidence thus infused into the body of regimental officers was diffused by them among the men. Thereby fiction had the effect of fact. For faith created facts—those of successful resistance to successive blows.

The result thus to be traced in the national army of Britain was repeated in the nation that stood behind it, as well as in the nations whose troops stood alongside it. If in 1914 Joffre may be described as a national nerve sedative, Foch in 1918 was an international nerve tonic. But he was more—the suggestion of invincibility which became the fact of victory.

Appendix

FOCH'S THEORY OF WAR

IN his first book, *Des Principes de la Guerre*, Foch aptly began by asking: "Can war be taught?" Without making an immediate attempt to answer this question, he then asserted that in France it had been taught in an irrational and impractical way prior to 1882-83. His reason, expressed in algebraic formulæ, was that the moral factors had been given a constant value, and only the material factors treated as variables—as the difference between victory and defeat. "The conclusion of the old theory, then, was: in order to conquer, you must have superior numbers, better rifles, better guns, more skilfully chosen positions."

It is curious that Foch should class the last among the material factors. The fact suggests a confusion of thought, or perhaps an omission of thought—to realise the part played by mental factors as the controlling balance between moral and material. This, perchance, may be the reason why his teachings, and later, his practice, seem to swing to the other extreme of underweighing material factors. For, in them, there is little emphasis either on ruse and deception or on superior weapons, as means of gaining the advantage. Thus in bringing out a new set of moral variables, Foch's teaching tends to give material factors a constant value, and does not adequately point out that by taking thought one may give them a higher value. His calculation of the material factors becomes arithmetical, counting numbers without due calculation of the higher yield that may be produced by the application of brain-power.

Having repudiated the material school of thought, Foch turned next to dismiss the argument that "war can only be

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taught by war." "For that school is not a continuous school at all: it can neither be opened at will, nor kept going for our instruction. It is even insufficient, for it could not prepare us for the first actions (which will also be the most decisive ones) of the next war. . . . It is therefore with a fully equipped mind that one ought to start in order to make war and even to understand war."

"The truth is, no study of war is possible on the battlefield; one does there simply what one *can* in order to apply what one *knows*. Therefore, in order to *do* even a little, one has already to *know* a great deal and to know it well." "This principle explains the weakness, in 1866, of the Austrians (whom the war of 1859 ought to have made wiser), as against the Prussians who had not fought since 1815. . . . The first made war without understanding it (as, incidentally, did the French in 1870, although they also had recently been at war). The second had understood war without making it, by means of careful study."

There was much truth in Foch's argument, but it ignored an important material factor, the advantage which the Prussians enjoyed in their breech-loading rifle against the Austrians' muzzle-loader. His illustration, too, took no account of the fact that if the defeated armies had some previous experience of the battlefield, they had far more of the parade-ground, and so might justly be classed as products of peace-time pedantry.

To create a true system, Foch declared, one must "base oneself on *facts*." "With this object in view, let us examine the facts which history gives us. In order to understand this complex phenomenon, war, under the numerous shapes it assumes, let us take those facts one after the other, let us examine them as closely as we can, under a microscope, so to speak; let us resort to microbiology, and let us do this while placing ourselves in the midst of the circumstances under which those facts arose: time, place, temperature, fatigue, numerous depressing causes, misunderstandings, etc., . . . let us consider the questions the actors have had to solve, the company in its zone of action, the battalion in the same way, the brigade, the army corps. . . . Let us discuss the decisions taken, the result obtained, let us treat

the question anew. . . . This minute study, as we shall see, has been completed in the case of several local actions. . . . After that we shall come to the *operations*. We have then to consider in detail the functioning of a living and operating army. . . . The teaching of our school has resulted from the sum of such minute studies."

This minute analysis of historical examples became not merely the system applied at the Ecole de Guerre but in all the military educational centres of the world during the generation before the World War. As here expounded by Foch, the scientific analogy gives it plausibility. But does the analogy itself stand analysis? The book contains detailed studies of one case each from Napoleon's campaigns of 1796, 1806, 1809, and 1815; one case from the war of 1866, and four from that of 1870. They constitute a book impressive in bulk. But would any scientist build a theory on a mere nine observations? We must bear in mind also that he applies his microscope to a case in progress, whereas the military student's microscope is applied only to the uncertain records of a case that is past. The more microscopic his examination the greater is the likelihood, indeed the certainty, of error. One may discover from messages, orders, and from the evidence of witnesses what was being done and thought by the commanders in rear. But to establish the exact action of the individual troop-units in the turmoil of conflict is a work of faith and not of science. We must remember that Foch had never been in battle. Perhaps if he had been, however humble his rôle, he would have come to doubt both the possibility and practical value of recreating the action of the company, battalion, and brigade. He might thus have realised the fundamental fallacy that underlies the microscopic method and his scientific analogy in support of it. The fallacy is the more dangerous because such "minute study" tends to concentrate the attention on the material conditions—weapons, equipment, transport—of a past case which will be different in the future, instead of on the moral factors which Foch set out to emphasise—factors which change in degree but not in kind.

Thus it becomes clear that Foch undertook his analysis of

history not to discover principles, but to illustrate principles which were already in his mind. He had received them from authority, not gained them from research. And his task, as he conceived it, was to pass them on to his pupils, using his powers to amplify their meaning.

This attitude comes out clearly in his own explanation. "What is the form of this teaching born from history and destined to grow by means of further historical studies? It came out in the shape of a *theory* of war which can be taught—which will be taught to you—and in the shape of a *doctrine*, which you will be taught to practise. What is meant by these words is the *conception* and the *practical application* not of a *science* of war nor of some limited dogma, composed of abstract truths outside which all would be heresy, but of a certain number of *principles*, the *application* of which, though they will not be open to discussion once they shall have been established, must logically vary according to circumstances, while always tending towards the same goal, and that an objective goal."

"The doctrine will extend itself to the higher side of war, owing to the free development given to your minds by a common habit of seeing, thinking, acting. . . ."

The critical mind finds here a curious series of contradictions. Both the theory and the doctrine will be taught to the student. Dogma is disavowed, although the doctrine consists of a certain number of principles which will not be discussable. Uniformity of thought will produce free development of thought.

These assertions suggest a confusion of thought in the teacher's mind. They can be correlated with religion but not with science. For they have an irresistible reminder of the spectacle of a late-Victorian ecclesiastic making a first tentative effort to reconcile the Book of Genesis with the smattering of science learnt in schooldays.

Foch appears to leave a loophole for the free use of reason when he qualifies the indisputability of the principles with the remark "once they shall have been established." But he is content to follow it with the simple declaration that "there is,

then, such a thing as a theory of war. That theory starts from a number of principles :

The principle of economy of forces.
 The principle of freedom of action.
 The principle of free disposal of forces.
 The principle of security, etc. . . ."

The indefiniteness of this list of principles, signalised by the "etcetera," is also apparent in the difficulty of drawing practical distinctions between the second and third. Thus we are not surprised to find that the only attempt to define the theory itself is a reference in the next chapter to the "true theory, that of the absolute war which Napoleon had taught Europe." But this is a theory of intention rather than of action.

While still leaving their nature obscure Foch declared that "fixed principles to be applied in a variable way ; according to circumstances, to each case which is always a *particular* one and has to be considered in itself ; such is our conclusive formula for the time being." But he then went on to say : " Each operation has a *raison d'être* ; that is, an object ; that object once determined, fixes the nature and value of the means to be resorted to as well as the use which ought to be made of the forces. That object is, in each case, the very answer to the famous question Verdy du Vernois asked himself when he reached the battlefield of Nachod.

"In presence of the difficulties which faced him, he looked into his own memory for an instance or a doctrine that would supply him with a line of conduct. Nothing inspired him. ' Let history and principles,' he said, ' go to the devil ! After all, *what must be done ?* ' "

One feels that Foch himself quotes the question with a sigh of relief, as a means of cutting the knots into which his argument has become tangled, and of escaping from any need to unravel the principles. " What must be done ? Once the habit has been acquired of studying and acting thus in numerous concrete cases, the work is done instinctively, automatically, so to speak, and this in consequence of the training the intellect has received." " Such results are again illustrated by another and more common-

place illustration. A wild fowl flies up in front of a sportsman ; if it goes from right to left, he fires in front and to the left ; if from left to right, he fires in front and to the right ; if it comes on him, he fires high ; if away from him, he fires low. In each of these cases he applies in a *variable* way the *fixed* principle : to get three points upon one straight line, his eye, the sight and the quarry, at the moment the shot takes effect."

One may question whether this simplifying illustration is not too simple to be true. Foch's sportsman is actually applying not a principle but a method, if in a variable way. Such instinctive action may be the base of sound execution in the heat of battle, but has dangerous limitations in the wider sphere of war, where policy and economics must be considered no less than the use of military force. Reliance on instinct involves the surrender of reason, and it is through reasoned calculation that any plan of war should be conceived. Thus we begin to have a suspicion that Foch was still thinking of war in terms of tactics.

Let us follow the conclusion to which Foch's argument leads. Instinctive action comes from experience, whether that be gained at first hand or in the study. Foch sought to derive his experience from the minute study of historical cases. These cases were obviously and inevitably limited. And the deduction is that the limits of his study represent the limits of his conception of war at the time he taught war. There is nothing to indicate that they had enlarged when he came to make war, although there is evidence of a wider view after he had made war.

Foch's opening chapter on the teaching of war comprises some eight thousand words. To trace any clear ray of thought running through them is difficult, and none the less because of the bright colouring of the panes which give a casual impression of radiance. It is with a sense that the author involved himself in needless confusion and contradictions through excess of verbiage that we come to his second chapter—on the "Primal Characteristics of Modern War."

He begins it with an effort to climb above the plane of tactics, with a desire "to determine the general features of war, in particular its *object* and *means*, the rational way in which the *goal*

must be conceived in the France of today, so that we may find in that study the foundation of our conduct, that is, of our tactics." The abrupt descent from war policy to tactics, missing out the plane of strategy, is perhaps a significant clue to Foch's thought. He goes on to argue that the form of war should be conceived differently in Paris from Brussels, London, or Madrid. Each country has a different situation and ambitions, which should shape its conception of war. Here we see Foch's practical bent, his *De quoi s'agit-il*. But may not the habit of thinking of war from a strictly French point of view curtail the view of what is best when France forms part of an alliance?

Foch, however, found a way—although a different way—of reconciling the general and the particular. He declared that there was an *absolute* theory—"that of the absolute war which Napoleon taught Europe." And, while recognising that it might not suit the case of some countries and some periods, he had no doubt that it met the need of modern France. To its neglect he ascribed the defeat of 1870. "To a people in arms, organised for conquest, invasion, a fight to a finish," France had opposed an army that was not drawn from the whole people and an idea of war based on limited, or "diplomatic," objects. "It is because the whole of Europe has now come back to the national thesis, and therefore to armed nations, that we stand compelled today to take up again the *absolute* concept of war, as revealed in history."

Foch took this theory of absolute war from Clausewitz, whose interpretation of Napoleon and war guided the general military thought of nineteenth-century Europe. The result of the 1870 war seemed to establish Clausewitz's theory beyond doubt. But did it? There was perhaps a confusion of thought in assuming that an armed nation necessarily meant absolute war. Has there ever been such a thing as absolute war since nations ceased to slaughter or enslave the defeated? Nineteenth-century Europe had passed beyond the Mongol stage. Some of the German military chiefs in 1870 may have thought of that war as Foch suggests, but not so Bismarck, nor even Moltke.

If "absolute war" has any meaning, it is that of a fight until

the capacity of one side for further resistance is exhausted. In practice, this may well mean that its opponent is on the verge of exhaustion. In other words, absolute war is a war wherein the conductor does not know when to stop. It implies that the end is pursued regardless of what lies beyond. The conductor allows the fighting instinct to usurp the control of his reason. If this be the logical definition of absolute war we may view St. Helena as the proof that Napoleon was its prophet. And today we know only too well where the theory has led us.

Let us now see where the assumption that armed nations must necessarily mean absolute war led Foch. First, it induced him to discard all models, all experience, prior to Napoleon. "We cannot draw our inspiration indifferently from Turenne, Condé, Prince Eugène, Villars, or Frederick the Great, even less from the tottering theories and degenerate forms of the last century. The best of these doctrines answered a situation and needs which are no longer ours. Our models, and the facts on which we will base a theory, we must seek in certain definite pages of history, namely from that period of the French Revolution when the whole nation was arming itself for the defence of its dearest interests : Independence, Liberty ; from that period of the Empire, when the army born of that violent crisis was taken in hand and led by the greatest military genius that ever was. . . ."

There is a curious inconsistency in the fact that Foch should take Napoleon's campaigns as his model and yet ignore, even while quoting, the opinion of Napoleon that "knowledge of the higher parts of war can only be acquired from experience and from studying the history of the wars of the great commanders. You cannot learn from a grammar how to write a book of the *Iliad*, a tragedy of Corneille." Napoleon's list of great commanders for study covered the whole course of history since Alexander. Hence it is obvious that he did not recommend a minute study of the details of their campaigns—as those details did not exist—but an attempt to study the general working of their minds. Foch preferred to master "grammar," and deliberately refrained from a study of all the great commanders save Napoleon and Moltke. Thus his theory of war would in-

evitably be built on a fragmentary foundation and so might prove of exceptional rather than universal application. An inverted pyramid of great detail would be balanced precariously on a slender apex.

Whilst rejecting a study of the art of war before Napoleon, Foch did not hesitate to criticise it. "To us at this moment of history, in the midst of modern Europe, that old fencing and those antiquated methods are illustrated by a kind of warfare in which there is no decisive solution, nothing but a limited end—a warfare consisting of manœuvres without fighting. . . ." After holding up to reprobation various quotations from eighteenth-century writers, Foch continues: "The same kind of warfare was thus characterised by Marshal de Saxe himself, although a man of undeniable ability: 'I am not in favour of giving battle, especially at the outset of a war. I am even convinced that a clever general can wage war his whole life without being compelled to do so.' Entering Saxony in 1806, Napoleon writes to Marshal Soult: 'There is nothing I desire so much as a great battle.' The one wants to avoid battle his whole life; the other demands it at the first opportunity. Further, these theories have the vice of building up magnificent systems on the mere properties and intrinsic value of ground."

There is much point in Foch's concluding criticism that the properties of ground should not be thus overestimated. The generals of the eighteenth century often did so. But at least they did not attain the absurdities of their successors, trained in the new theory, who in 1914-18 proclaimed the capture of a few acres of mud as victories and forbade their troops to give up a yard of such ground, regardless of the cost. This sentence of Foch's makes curious reading in the light of Ypres, 1914 and 1915, and of Artois, 1915.

His comparison of the ideas of Saxe and Napoleon has the defect of its conciseness. Saxe had actually added: "I would not be understood to say that an opportunity of bringing on a general action, in which you have all imaginable reason to expect victory, ought to be neglected; but only to insinuate that it is possible to make war without trusting anything to accident,

which is the highest point of skill and perfection within the province of a general."

Saxe was a connoisseur of the art of war, and in setting forth the ideal was obviously employing hyperbole. His own record comprises several great battles, all victories. The exact measure of his thought is to be found, rather, in his admonition: "Decline the attack altogether unless you can make it with advantage." We know that it was not heeded by the generals who were bred in the nineteenth-century school of war. Similarly, Napoleon's meaning suffers when the quoted phrase is considered apart from the circumstances. He desired battle because the moment was ripe. If there was a difference between Saxe's outlook and Napoleon's, with results that can be seen in history, there was not the complete contrast which Foch implies. Like most of his fellow-students, Foch had swung, in reaction from an extreme which Saxe had never reached, to an extreme which Napoleon had never contemplated.

Foch's view of the cause of indecisiveness in eighteenth-century warfare was corrected by a successor at the *Ecole de Guerre*, Colin, who had studied war more widely and Napoleon more deeply. He caustically remarked that limited results and slow methods were not peculiar to this century; that they could be discovered even in the wars waged by the armed peoples of Greece and Republican Rome. He argued that indecisiveness in war was due to the resistance of material factors rather than to irresolute intentions. "There was a simple way of avoiding such mistakes, and that was to go and spend a few hours among the public archives, or even to read a few pages of the political correspondence of Richelieu or of Frederick, when the sentiments that animated the rulers of those days would have been apparent, as well as the motives that inspired the conduct of their generals. And it would also have been seen that governments, far from inculcating generals with dilatoriness, were perpetually reproaching them for it." If dilatoriness was prevalent, it was largely the product of material hindrances, or at least of the habit formed in wrestling with them. What were the material causes of indecisiveness? First, that the development of fortification had out-

paced that of weapons, giving to the defensive in the eighteenth century a preponderance such as was restored to it in the twentieth by the machine-gun. Second, armies were not yet organised in permanently self-organised fractions—divisions—but usually moved and fought as a single “piece,” a condition which limited their scope of movement and power of distracting the opponent. A third, if perhaps lesser handicap, was due to ethical progress. For an increased humanity in the conduct of war increased the dependence of armies upon magazines and dépôts for their supplies. This tended to cramp movement and encourage siege operations. In contrast, the chaotic supply system and the undisciplined nature of the French Revolutionary armies was to compel a reversion to the old practice of living on the country. And, owing to the new organisation of the army in permanent divisions, this practice detracted less from the army’s effectiveness than in old days. By moving apart from each other the divisions could feed themselves more easily, and while feeding themselves could be fulfilling their part in the general plan. Napoleon perceived and turned to profit this dual condition. His army formed a wide-stretching net that was only drawn tight round the object of his cast. At the outset of his first campaign of 1796, his sixty thousand men were stretched over seventy-five miles. In his next campaign he distributed an army of forty-five thousand men over a front of a hundred miles. When he became Emperor—and his divisions, corps—he assembled the Grand Army on still wider frontages. Yet in the eyes of many superficial students of war Napoleon is the exponent of extreme and unvarying concentration.

The consequences of this delusion have been seen in modern war. It is true that increased numbers made it difficult to leave wider intervals between the army corps or armies—and so cramped Napoleonic manœuvres—but even where an interval was possible, commanders have avoided leaving it. Instead, they have closed in to close it, fearful of the risks they might run if they did not march shoulder to shoulder—but reckless of the opportunities thus lost for menacing and out-flanking their opponents. Yet the risks to their own security

had grown less as the range of weapons and the means of communication had developed.

It is to the credit of Colin that he disinterred the facts of history, and avoided the glib assumption that the difference between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century warfare was a difference of spirit.

But in some of his deductions from the facts Colin shared the common pitfall. He believed that "progress in firearms invariably favours the offensive." Foch similarly declared that "any improvement in firearms is ultimately bound to add strength to the offensive, to a cleverly conducted attack. History shows it, reason explains it."

Colin's argument for his belief was, however, the better reasoned. Its basis was that improved weapons give the widely distributed parts of an army greater resisting power, and so allow more time and resources to be available for the decisive manœuvre. This is true so far as there is space and aptitude for such wide distribution, although even then it only holds true so long as weapon values in attack and defence are comparable. It breaks down if a superior weight of fire in the attack does not suffice to overcome the weapons of the defences.

Foch, on the other hand, justified his contention not by logic but by arithmetic.

"Nothing is easier than to give a mathematical demonstration of that truth :

Suppose you launch 2 battalions against	..	..	..	..	1
You then launch 2,000 men against	..	..	..	..	1,000
With a rifle fire of 1 shot to a minute, 1,000 defenders will					
fire ..	..	..	..	..	1,000 bullets
With the same rifle, 2,000 assailants will fire	..	..	..	2,000	„
Balance in favour of the attack	..	..	..	1,000	„

With a rifle firing 10 shots a minute, 10,000 defenders will					
fire within 1 minute	..	..	..	..	10,000 „
With the same rifle, 2,000 assailants will fire	..	..	..	20,000	„
Balance	..	..	..	..	10,000 „

As you see, the material superiority of fire quickly increases in favour of the attack as a result of improved firearms."

This mathematical but astonishingly unpractical calculation leaves out of account the question of fire effect; the facility of fire while lying down that was given by the modern rifle; the defender's ability to fire from behind cover and with more careful aim; the larger target which the attacker offers. If some of these advantages of the rifle in defence were reduced by the development of artillery, this in turn was more than offset by the advent of the machine-gun. In the light of 1914-18 Foch's mathematics appear at fault.

Yet this brief calculation satisfied him that he could discount "the omnipotence falsely ascribed to material power." With it he dismissed the influence of armament and passed on to the moral factors. Yet, paradoxically, to these he ascribed an essentially physical foundation: "No victory without fighting." It is the more curious that he should have disregarded economic pressure because he followed this declaration with the inconsistent argument that war between modern nations was essentially economic in origin: "War is now becoming the means they use to enrich themselves." In proof, he pointed to the economic benefits which Germany had gained from the war of 1870, and claimed the Chino-Japanese, Spanish-American, and South African wars as further proofs of his thesis. "Who was responsible for the Boer War? Certainly not the Queen of England, but the merchants of the City."

"War, today, is a commercial enterprise undertaken by the whole nation. It concerns the individual more directly than did war in the past, and therefore appeals much more to individual passions." Seemingly it was this idea—the passion shown by the grasping peasant, rather than the calculation made by the merchant—that inspired Foch's conception of the nature of future war. The successful merchant knows when to cut his loss; he will not ruin himself to beat a competitor. In 1914-18 the warring nations assuredly did not show this commercial acumen. In so far, they justified Foch's conception. But the heads of commerce and industry were not blinded by passion, and patriotism had

no relation to the profit that some drew. With the masses, passion was but a fitful and partial flame from a deeper emotional disturbance. This mood cooled gradually to a grey acquiescence. The national leaders declared that the struggle must be pursued to decisive victory, although they began to see that it could not repay the cost. But they had lost the pre-Clausewitzian habit of settlement by negotiation, of making the best of a bad bargain. This reflection suggests that the nations were enslaved by a military doctrine—the doctrine of a fight to a finish—from which, once committed to war, they were helpless to shake free.

But Foch saw no inconsistency in ascribing to modern nations, in wars of economic cause, the emotions of the French Revolution. And, owing to "the similarity," he deduced that "it is to the theory of *decision by arms* that war is now wholly returning; one can now apply no other." "*No strategy can henceforth prevail over that which aims at ensuring tactical results, victory by fighting.* A strategy paving the way to tactical decisions alone: this is the end we come to. . . ." Foch's verdict was reinforced by a long quotation from Clausewitz which, as one of many, confirms the impression that Foch's theory of war was but the reflection of Clausewitz, save for certain contradictions original to himself. But, because Foch's mind was simpler and his study narrower, he concentrated on the more concrete points of Clausewitz—and pressed them to an extreme. Instead of seeing tactics as a tool of strategy, he made strategy merely the servant of tactics.

"As, then, strategy does not exist by itself . . . as tactical results are everything, let us see out of what those results are made." Again quoting Clausewitz, and carrying his doctrine to a theoretical extreme, Foch declared "the necessity of organising a shock both supreme and final." "It is characterised by three things—preparation, mass, impulsion." "Preparation in modern war is more necessary and must be pushed further than in the past. . . . One thing alone is of import: the point of preparation reached at the actual outbreak of war. . . . Thus the nature of Napoleonic preparation has been, so to speak, reinforced; it has been reinforced to such a degree that the results

of the first operations have been both hastened and made crushing and final."

Foch's conception shows the influence of a particular case, that of 1870. The trend of his thought helps us to realise why the value of reserves, not to mention economic and sea power, was so underrated by the French leaders before 1914.

"Let us now turn to tactical action. In what does it consist? There is but one means of treating with the adversary, namely to beat him, and therefore to overthrow him. Hence the idea of a shock composed of two terms: *mass* and *impulsion*." "May we not stand and await that shock? Certainly not. If we did not seek it, it might well either not occur at all, or occur under bad conditions and we might then fail to destroy the forces of the adversary, which is in war the only means of reaching our end." Thus we see Foch, denying all virtue to the defensive, pave the way for the extreme theory of the offensive, the offensive under all circumstances.

He begins his third chapter with the statement: "As we have previously seen, modern war knows but one argument: the tactical fact, battle." But, having simplified the practice of war to the theoretical ideal of an immediate and final battle, Foch becomes practical in his detailed treatment of this theory. Indeed, his discussion of it is almost exclusively logistical, dwelling upon the factors of time, space and movement, with comparatively slight reference to the psychological side.

In order to make the shock possible, the "mobile and unknown enemy must first be *discovered*, then *reconnoitred*, then *fixed*, or pinned, so that the play of our forces may strike him." For these purposes, as well as to safeguard one's own concentration while hindering the enemy's, a series of detachments must be provided. Foch recognises that this initial *dispersion* is in apparent contradiction of his emphasis on *concentration*. But he finds in the "principle of economy of forces" a way of reconciliation. This "economy" was used not in the sense of sparing, of "economising," but in the sense of economic management. Instead of a fixed distribution of the army according to precon-

ceived rôles, all parts should be interchangeable and utilised to the full measure of their capacity.

"The principle of economy of forces is the art of pouring out *all* one's resources at a given moment on one spot ; of making use there of *all* troops, and, to make such a thing possible, of making those troops permanently communicate with each other, instead of dividing them and attaching to each fraction some fixed and invariable function ; its second part, a result having been attained, is the art of again so disposing the troops as to converge upon, and act against, a new single object. Again : the economy of forces is the art of making the weight of *all* one's forces *successively* bear on the resistance which one may meet, and therefore of organising those forces by means of a *system*."

It would perhaps have been more exact, and shorter, to say that an army should always be so distributed that its parts can come to each other's aid and combine to produce the *maximum possible* concentration of force at one place, while the *minimum necessary* force is engaged elsewhere in the task of ensuring the security and success of the concentration.

To concentrate *all* is an unrealisable ideal. Moreover, in practice the "minimum necessary" may actually form a far larger proportion of the total than the "maximum possible." It would even be true to say that the larger the force that is effectively used for distraction of the enemy, the greater is the chance of the concentration succeeding in its aim. For, otherwise, it may strike an object too solid to be shattered. Superior weight at the intended decisive point does not suffice unless that point cannot be reinforced in time by the opponent. It rarely suffices unless that point is not merely weaker numerically but has been weakened morally. Napoleon suffered some of his worst checks because he neglected this guarantee. And the need for *distraction* has grown with the delaying power of weapons. Foch did not emphasise, nor, it would seem, adequately realise, this qualifying condition to the principle of economy of forces.

He traced the principle to Carnot's instructions to the generals of the Revolution. "He sought to remedy the *scattering and crumbling* which were ruining France's considerable forces (fourteen

armies in 1794) by means of convergence of effort and singleness of goal. . . . For the block of the ancient armies, which could no longer reappear, as it was utterly incapable of manœuvring on the new scale, he tried to substitute concordance and synchrony in many efforts starting from various points." The tribute to Carnot is well earned, but Foch reveals the limitations of his historical knowledge when he adds: "At Wattignies, Carnot being present, *the idea of an attack by superior forces on a point of the line first made its appearance.*" The idea, as a definite conception, can certainly be traced back to Leuctra in 371 B.C. But even if Foch was ignorant of classical warfare, it is curious that he should have been so obsessed with the French Revolution as to overlook Frederick the Great's oblique order. A different method of production did not make it a different idea.

In showing how the main blow should be delivered, Foch quoted Napoleon's words at Leoben: "I see only one thing, the *masses*; I try to destroy them, feeling sure that the *accessories* will fall of themselves." This quotation, a favourite one with all the disciples of Clausewitz, has a brevity that is dangerously misleading. The words were spoken by Napoleon to the enemy generals with whom he was negotiating an armistice. They were uttered at the end of a campaign in which he had first concentrated on and defeated the Austrians' weaker partner; then had enticed successive parts of the Austrian Army to his chosen battleground; and, in each successive phase, had concentrated against a fraction of each part. Napoleon's ultimate aim may have been to "destroy the masses"; his method had been to destroy them piecemeal. He only told his opponents the obvious conclusion, not how he had beaten them.

The success of his concentration was dependent on his opponents' dispersion, and his own dispersion was the necessary prelude to theirs. Foch did not dwell on this aspect. His emphasis is placed on the direct means of protecting one's own concentration: "In order to dispose of the adversary's masses, we have to ensure the working of our own." "From that condition . . . will arise all those subordinate parts assigned to detachments (advanced guards, flank guards, rear guards) to

which we apply the general name of advanced guards." "They must remain closely connected with the main body, in the movement of which they participate, from which they draw their life, for the benefit of which alone they do their work; that connection must be close enough to allow the body always to concentrate its whole weight as well as all disengaged forces in the direction where the adversary has been perceived or seized; a final result which can only be attained . . . by means of a systematic organisation involving: *eyes* turned towards such directions as are of interest to the issue; *arms* extended in such directions as menace peril; freedom of movement for the main body to strike finally in the direction *selected* for the result."

Here we see Foch's adoption of Bonnal's theory that the secret of Napoleon's method and his success lay in the use of a strategic advanced guard—as tentacles to feel for and seize hold of the opponent. Foch gave a more elastic sense to the idea which tended to become geometrical. He also recognised the value and necessity of defence on the part of the tentacles. "Their resisting power in presence of superior enemy forces will result either from (1) a *defensive action* utilising a strong position and holding back an enemy unable to overcome it; or (2) a *retreating manœuvre* the duration of which (being itself dependent on available time and space) will allow the main body to act in accord with the plan conceived."

Foch illustrated his idea of the principle of economy of force by an analytical narrative of Bonaparte's first campaign of 1796. With a wealth of carefully chosen detail to paint the picture, he showed Bonaparte on the Genoese Riviera, facing the Allied Austrian and Piedmontese Armies, which together had the numerical superiority. Whilst Carnot, obsessed by his new theory, urged that the French should march directly toward Milan and strike at the main enemy—the Austrians—Bonaparte preferred to march against the joint between the two armies and then, having pushed back the inner flank of the Austrians in confusion, to strike decisively at the isolated Piedmontese.

Foch admirably sketched the fulfilment of Bonaparte's plan. He showed how Bonaparte utilised his wide grouping to throw

his weight in successive directions ; how he first checked the Austrian threat against his extreme right near Genoa ; then delivered a quick thrust against the Austrian centre, meantime seizing a point of approach to the joint ; then striking at the joint, while simultaneously clearing the path for the outward wheel against the Piedmontese ; finally, making this advance against the now exposed inner flank of the Piedmontese, who capitulated before the approaching menace to their capital, Turin.

There is an ironical flavour in the fact that Foch, who had just previously asserted that the only purpose of strategy was to pave the way for a tactical decision, should have chosen as his first example a campaign which was decided by strategy without a decisive battle—and decided through a menace to one of the “geographical objectives” which Foch derided. Napoleon confessed at St. Helena : “I have fought sixty battles and I have learned nothing I did not know at the beginning.” Perhaps he had unlearned something. For at least it is true that his first campaign was decided by strategy so superior that there was no opportunity for battle. It was an example that fulfilled Marshal Saxe’s ideal.

Seemingly, Foch’s faith in the theory that he had imbibed from Clausewitz was so strong as to blind him to the very facts he utilised. For, instead of accepting the natural explanation for Bonaparte’s plan, Foch laboriously argued that Carnot’s principle of concentrating against the main army first did not apply here because the enemy armies “represented two distinct groups, each with divergent interests. . . .” “Both adversaries had, therefore, to be beaten separately, both questions had to be treated separately ; the war could not be brought to an end by striking one of the enemy armies, even though it were the stronger of the two.” Yet in 1914-18, when the enemy alliance offered a similar divergency, Foch forgot his own argument in urging that Germany must be beaten first.

It is the more curious that he should have invented such an excuse for Bonaparte’s plan because he quotes Bonaparte’s own words in explanation of his choice—“to attack the enemy in the best direction,” and “to attack one isolated fragment of the opposing forces, the Piedmontese Army, once it was definitely

deprived of any external help." "By entering Italy via Savona, Cadibona, Carcare, and Bormida, one might hope to separate the Sardinian from the Austrian Army, because from that direction one threatened Lombardy and Piedmont equally. The interest of the Piedmontese was to cover Turin, that of the Austrians to cover Milan."

This explanation also contradicts the superficial deduction drawn from Napoleon's remark: "I see only one thing." If he struck at only one point at a time, he saw two points—and made his enemy see them. Here he discloses an essential part of his method, that of taking a line which threatened alternative objectives, thus distracting his opponents' mind and forces. Seventy years later another military genius, Sherman, was to rediscover the method and to express its aim as that of "putting the enemy on the horns of a dilemma." For full effect this elastic direction must be carried to an elastic end. Although the commander may initially decide to seek one of his alternative objectives, if the enemy concentrates to cover this he will be wise to strike at the other, more exposed. A plan must have branches like a tree if it is to bear fruit. A plan with a simple aim is like a barren pole. Napoleon expressed his perception of this truth when he said to Gourgaud that "the great art" was "to change, during the action, the line of operations; it is an idea of mine, which is entirely new." The last claim, however, was unjust; it ignored Napoleon's debt to the teachings of Bourcet, who, fifty years earlier, had laid down that "every plan of campaign ought to have several branches and to have been so well thought out that one or other of the said branches cannot fail of success."

How strange that the military thinkers of the nineteenth century should have ignored the pattern of Napoleon's manoeuvre when thus confirmed from his own mouth! Both their precepts and their practice show that they confused singleness of stroke with singleness of objective. Thereby their stroke lost the moral sharpness necessary to cleave the opponent's shield, while they, in consequence, too often blunted the moral edge of their own weapon.

This material and physical trend of thought is clearly seen

in the conclusion of Foch's chapter on economy of forces. "In strategy as in tactics, a decision is constantly enforced by mechanics, by applying to part of the enemy forces a main body made as strong as possible. . . . To this end *forces* must be constantly arranged according to a system : (1) On the periphery, a number of advanced guards (i) attacking in order to reconnoitre, (ii) to fix the enemy to the benefit of (iii) the main body, (iv) or parrying an attack in order to cover the main body; (2) in the rear, the *main body* manœuvring in the direction of the objective aimed at. The main body and the advanced guards must be in constant communication with each other, so as to allow, at a given moment, the transference of the whole weight of the mass in the direction of the objective attacked."

What Foch termed "this new conception of military mechanics" is admirable—as the mechanical side of economy of force. But to mystify, mislead, and surprise the enemy is even more essential, for it gives to the available forces a higher value. Yet Foch did not dwell on these moral agents. The rôles assigned to his "advanced guards" were essentially protective, designed to secure his main body against surprise by the enemy. Thus, to our surprise, we find that Foch reverted from a moral to a mechanical conception of war when he came down from abstractions to concrete problems.

Foch's study of the moral factors was one-sided. His concern with them was to guarantee the working of his own machine rather than to interfere with the enemy's. To this problem, this half of the problem, the rest of his book is devoted.

The fourth chapter is entitled "Intellectual Discipline"; taking the principle of "freedom of action" as a corollary to economy of force, he treated freedom of action as a function of obedience. As economy of force is the product of combination, so that combination depends on the intelligent subordination of each part to the interests of the whole. The Commander-in-Chief "alone writes music and leads the orchestra. The others only play their part in that orchestra." Here we see a metaphor that was a favourite with Foch in later years.

For harmonious combination there must be: "*A mental discipline*, as a first condition; showing and prescribing to all subordinates the result aimed at by the commander. *Intelligent and active discipline*, or rather *initiative*, a second condition, in order to maintain the right and power of acting in the desired direction." "Such a notion obviously involves an act of deliberate thought, of reflection; it excludes mental immobility, want of thought, intellectual silence—all of which are well enough for the rank and file who have but to perform (although it would certainly be better for them to understand what they have to perform), but which would never do for the subordinate commander: the latter must bring to fruition, with all the means at his disposal, the scheme of the higher command; therefore he must, above all, understand that thought, and afterwards make of his means *the use best suited to circumstances*—of which, however, he is the *only judge*." "To *passive obedience*, such as used to be in favour under the absolute systems of the past, we oppose *active obedience*."

"To be disciplined does not mean that one does not commit any breach of discipline; . . . does not mean being silent, abstaining, or doing only what one thinks one may undertake *without risk*; it is not the art of *eluding responsibility*; it means *acting* in compliance with orders received, and therefore of *finding in one's own mind*, by effort and reflection, the possibility to carry out such orders. It also means *finding in one's own will* the energy to face the risks involved in execution."

This definition is apt in spirit. To illustrate it Foch used an example from 1870. He showed how on August 4th De Failly received an order to concentrate his army corps at Bitche, where he would be able to support Marshal de MacMahon. By excessive fear for its own security, combined with ill-conceived measures, the corps suffered such delays that it arrived too late to take part in the battle and too exhausted to retrieve the issue. Ignorance on the part of the commanders had been the equivalent of indiscipline. Hence Foch devotes his next chapter to a practical study of how the problem of the march should have been treated and the security of the corps ensured. It is, above all, a lesson in

the intelligent use of a flank guard, using natural positions to delay for the time necessary any enemy approach which might have interfered with the smooth progress of the main body to Bitche.

Then, as a positive example, Foch takes the case of General von Kettler's operations against Garibaldi's army in January, 1871. Kettler's brigade had been ordered by his superior, Manteuffel, to march on Dijon in order to forestall interference from the French forces there. He had four thousand men against over thirty thousand. He attacked in turn a series of points which were suited to his slender means of attack, which could then be economically held, and which would provide a secure pivot for a fresh manœuvre. By his calculated audacity he deceived Garibaldi as to his strength and immobilised Garibaldi's forces while Manteuffel was defeating Bourbaki. That Kettler paid heavily for this achievement did not matter, for the repulse of his detachment counted for nothing beside the success of the army to which it belonged. This was an example after Foch's heart, and he describes it with an enthusiasm that is untinged by any national prejudice.

This concrete illustration of "intellectual discipline" paves the way to a general discussion of the meaning of *sûreté*. The word "security" is normally used in translation to express the idea; but no single English word is adequate. For *sûreté* has the sense of sureness as well as of assurance of safety; it implies that the commander acts with secure knowledge as well as with physical protection. This fuller sense must be understood when, in what follows, the term "security" is used to denote Foch's *sûreté*.

Foch defines the condition as embracing :

"(1) *Material security*, which makes it possible to avoid enemy blows when one does not desire to strike back or cannot do so; this is the means of *feeling secure* in the midst of danger, of halting and marching under shelter.

"(2) *Tactical security*, which makes it possible to continue carrying out a programme, an order received, in spite of chance unfavourable circumstances produced by war, in spite of the

unknown, of measures taken by the enemy of his own free will ; also to act *securely and with certainty, whatever the enemy may do*, by safeguarding *one's own freedom of action*.

"Material surprise means losing material security ; we have, in the case of such surprise, the enemy freely firing into our billets, our bivouacs, or our marching columns. Tactical surprise means endangering tactical security, losing freedom of action."

Foch then points out that the advanced guard, using the term in its comprehensive sense, is the organ which guarantees tactical security by its action, while its own protective dispositions—its use of advanced detachments or outposts, reinforced if necessary—provide material security both to itself and the main body. That security "is based on two elements, two mathematical quantities : *time* and *space* ; it also contains a third element : the *resisting power* of the troops." Foch adds that "so far as *space* is concerned, the following principle is both absolute and elementary : a force must always be master of the ground surrounding it up to the extreme range of its weapons, if it wishes to avoid being outflanked, enveloped, encircled, exposed to the havoc wrought by modern weapons, destroyed before being able to fight. That space which ought to be protected from the blows and observation of the enemy is what we call the *zone of manœuvre*."

But the advanced guard is also a means of paving the way for the battle. For this it must :

"(1) Supply information as to what point or points ought to be struck.

"(2) Guarantee the possibility of bringing and deploying the main body face to face with the selected objectives.

"(3) Cover the main body during all preparatory operations." "The *unknown* is the ruling condition of war . . . how can we master that unavoidable unknown, how shall we manage to see through the thick fog which always shrouds the situations and actions of the enemy ? By utilising the advanced guard."

Foch illustrates his meaning with one of his most apt metaphors. "When one moves at night, without light, in one's own house, what does one do ? Does one not (though it is a ground

one knows well) extend one's arm in front of one so as to avoid knocking one's head against the wall? The extended arm is nothing but an advanced guard."

"The arm keeps its suppleness while it advances and only stiffens more or less when it meets an obstacle, in order to perform its duty without risk, to open a door, etc. ; in the same way, the advanced guard can advance and go into action without risk, provided it uses suppleness and strength, manœuvring power, resisting power."

Foch points out that conditions have changed with the increasing range of weapons. In Napoleon's time the unknown disappeared when one arrived on the battlefield, and could see the enemy forces. Long-range weapons brought greater dispersion and distances. The advent of smokeless powder made it difficult even to gauge where the enemy units were posted. Hence the advanced guard must break through the enemy's covering troops in order to reconnoitre his main body. As one's own main body will be strung out on the road behind, the advanced guard must also be able to cover it while it is assembling and preparing its attack. During this interval the advanced guard must be capable not only of resisting but of gaining vantage-points which will facilitate the impending attack. Foch illustrates each point with historical examples.

But the advanced guard must also pin down the enemy. "You cannot strike with your fist an enemy who is running away in order to evade the blow. You must first seize him by the collar to compel him to receive the blow. The hand on the collar is the action of the advanced guard."

It is significant that Foch conceives the enemy either as trying to evade the blow or as striking a blow at him. It is thus, perhaps, that he does not consider the action appropriate when the enemy is waiting, solidly and ready, to resist his blow. Again, while he lays great stress on the "retreating manœuvre," or strategic retreat, as a means to be used by advanced forces in warding off the enemy's interference, he does not suggest its possibilities as a means of preparing one's own blow—*i.e.*, luring the enemy from his own ground into an advantageous situation for a counter-

stroke. Yet this had been one of the favourite manœuvres of the great commanders before Napoleon, and the occasional manœuvre that had repaid Napoleon himself most richly.

Foch does, however, emphasise two additional points of value. First, that the advanced guard should be composed of all arms, not of cavalry alone, which do not possess adequate penetrative or resisting power, and so cannot adequately fulfil the triple function of searching, covering, and pinning. Second, that the need for an advanced guard does not end when the main body has deployed ; it should remain in being and active so as to prevent the opponent regaining his freedom of action while the attack is developing.

Foch now proceeds to amplify his theory of advanced guard action by an analysis of the Battle of Nachod in 1866, which occupies seventy pages, a fifth of the whole book. It is a study of the advanced guard to the Prussian V Corps under Steinmetz. Thus it is essentially a study of tactical security, within the narrow limits of a single corps' front and march-route. And because of this large-scale survey of a small incident, this "minute study," the deductions had inevitably a relatively uncertain factual basis. Nevertheless, the chapter forms a suggestive and able treatise on the mechanics of action, and, to a less degree, on the psychology of command.

It is too full for an adequate summary, but some of the comments are sidelights on Foch's thought : "The Austrians were to have the luck at the beginning. . . . There are other things in war than principles ; there is time, places, distances, ground, chance which cannot be mastered. The Austrians ended all the same in being beaten. You cannot violate principles with impunity ; fortune tires out, mind soon vindicates its right over matter and chance."

"To command, in the sense implied by the extension of modern battle, can only consist, for the commander-in-chief, in determining clearly the result to be aimed at, the general function ascribed to each subordinate unit in the operations undertaken by the whole of the forces ; at the same time such a determination must leave the subordinate chief entirely free to choose the means which have to be used. . . ."

Particularly illuminating are Foch's comments on the minor tactics of the attack, or at least its tactical mechanism. In his valuation of fire he was certainly more of a realist than many of his contemporaries and disciples.

He criticised the Austrians because they "thought they would secure speed by cohesion ; they only secured rigidity ; the latter prevented them utilising the broken ground. . . . Moreover, this arrangement of theirs entirely overlooked *action by fire*."

"Fire has, indeed, become an unavoidable phase of that action through force called *attack*. You can no longer assault an untouched adversary as one so often did in the old days, by merely appealing to energy." Had Foch an uneasy intuition of the 1914 doctrine and its consequences ? "The stronger moral qualities in troops melt away under the efforts of modern arms if the enemy is permitted to let loose his whole power."

He was sufficiently conservative to hold that "attack with the bayonet . . . always reappears as a supreme and necessary argument in order to complete the enemy's demoralisation by threatening to board him as if he were a ship, also in order to create fear." But he declared that "it nevertheless remains undeniable that superiority of fire is an advantage one ought to secure ; first, in order to reduce him, to make it easier to assault him ; and secondly, in order to reach the moral level which is required for an assault."

Foch accepted the German theory of dividing the attack into three stages : the first, an advance to a fire-position within six to eight hundred yards of the enemy ; the second, a fire-action to gain superiority ; third, an advance to the assault. With notable common sense he argued that in the first place the use of "ground, and such sheltered approaches as the ground may contain" provided "the only really efficient means of advancing in spite of the enemy's fire, for then the enemy ceases to see." The infantry should move in "small, scattered units." Rigid formations and formalism should be eschewed, and they should "slip on" along covered approaches and from cover to cover.

He emphasised, too, the essential importance of "training camps, which alone make it possible to study *the conduct of troops*

in action (fire in war) and to give the rank and file a thorough and practical fire-training." He foresaw the "successive" form of the infantry attack in modern warfare against a resistance distributed in depth, and to some degree the type of local manœuvre that culminated in the infiltration method of 1918. "It is into such a series of successive actions that combat transforms itself as a consequence of modern armament; the attacking force tries to advance to the right when it can no longer advance straight ahead; it tries to manœuvre by a wing when the other wing is held up. . . ."

These views entitle him to be numbered among the progressive school of tactical thought. He was, again, more practical than the doctrine of 1914 when he said: "We must also apply all the guns available. We shall ask the artillery to prepare the attack"—not merely to support it.

But he conformed to the rather academic belief that "superiority in numbers," in the fire-action on the eight hundred yard distant position "should guarantee superior efficiency," and that it would usually suffice to beat down the enemy's fire. The fallacy of such arithmetical calculations and overestimate of the effect of fire on men behind cover was revealed in 1914, as it had already been in 1904. It is also significant of an outlook that in appraising the causes of Prussian success against the Austrians he made no direct reference to the breech-loading rifle of the former. He merely mentioned among these causes "of course, the superiority of armament" and immediately added, "but even more . . . a strict discipline, in close formation . . . which had made it possible . . . to direct the fire effectively."

His study of Nachod concluded, Foch devotes two chapters to "Strategical Surprise" and "Strategical Security" respectively. But the reader suffers a surprise on finding that the former chapter deals only with the means of preventing surprise. It shows how, on August 15th, 1870, Moltke imperilled his Second Army by jumping to the conclusion that the French were completely beaten and telling the armies: "It is likely that they are by now in full retreat on Verdun." Prince Frederick Charles, commanding the Second Army, promptly interpreted the likeli-

hood as a certainty, and, given a free hand, hurried towards the Meuse with the idea of catching the beaten foe. But the French were still near Metz and had not been truly beaten. In consequence, Frederick Charles blundered into them with only part of his army and, isolated from the other armies, was lucky to escape being beaten. Foch rubbed in the lesson of *sûreté*, while showing that the subordinates on the spot were alive to the danger. "People in high quarters believed they could do without security; the performers in the front rank reinstate security. They do not advance blindfold in the midst of danger. It was merely human; such a game would have proved too risky for them."

It is, as Foch says, "a highly practical lesson." But it reads a little ironically in the light of October, 1914.

The chapter entitled "Strategical Security" differs only from the other in giving positive examples. It takes first the advance of Eugène's army in the campaign of 1809, and quotes Napoleon's instructions to Eugène to use a strong advanced guard in feeling his way, instead of acting on supposition. Next, Foch utilises the comments of Clausewitz on 1815 to show how the Prussians had time to concentrate at Ligny because Ziethen's corps, as advanced guard, served to absorb and delay the shock. It acted, in fact, as a pneumatic buffer. But its loss and risk would have been less if it had originally been further in advance of the other corps, for in the buffer rôle a slow retreat is more advisable than a fighting stand, but needs sufficient room. Foch remarks that the time resistance may safely last "has obviously increased with modern arms." This was a true forecast, and it is rather curious that he did not perceive the underlying contradiction to his earlier deduction that the improvement in firearms favoured the offensive.

The book passes, or passes more completely, to the subject of battle in its concluding chapters. If the book had been called, not *The Principles of War*, but *Some Principles of Tactics*, it would have been more true to its nature and a truer expression of its limitations. In "The Battle: Decisive Attack," Foch opens in his resonant platform manner with the reiterated declaration:

"In order to reach its *end* . . . modern war uses but one *means* : the destruction of the organised forces of the enemy." "Let us come today to battle, which is the only *argument* in war, therefore the only end that must be given to strategical operations. . . ." We seem to hear the Muse of History laughing quietly in the wings.

"Defensive battle never brings about the destruction of enemy forces ; it never allows one to conquer the ground held by the enemy (which after all is the only external sign of victory), therefore, it is unable to create victory." Much truth as these arguments hold, we do not recall that Foch disclaimed victory after the defensive Battle of Ypres, 1914. "Hence the conclusion that the *offensive* form alone, be it resorted to at once or only after the *defensive*, can lead to results, and must therefore *always* be adopted. . . . Any defensive battle must, then, end in an offensive action, in a riposte, in a successful counter-offensive, otherwise there is no assault." This qualifying admission that the defensive-offensive has its place encourages the reader's expectation that it will be adequately discussed, perhaps illustrated by a study of Austerlitz. But this passing reference proves to be the last, as it was the first, recognition in the book of such a form of action.

Then, turning to the factors which determine the issue of battle, Foch quoted Napoleon's saying : "Two Mamelukes could hold their own against three Frenchmen ; but a hundred Frenchmen did not fear a hundred Mamelukes ; three hundred would beat an equal number ; and a thousand would beat one thousand five hundred—so great was the influence of *tactics*, *order*, and *manœuvres*." These are the factors that bring victory. Foch further claims : "We, the French, possess a fighter, a soldier, undeniably superior to the one beyond the Vosges in his racial qualities, activity, intelligence, spirit, power of exaltation, devotion, patriotism. . . . If we are beaten it will be due to the weakness of our tactics." The sweeping claim is more creditable to the fervent patriot than to the scientific soldier. And in suggesting that faulty tactics might prove the cause of defeat, Foch unaccountably overlooked strategy. In failure here was to lie the initial cause of defeat in August, 1914.

Foch then enquires how a superior tactical combination gains its end. Is it by inflicting a "high total of losses," bringing to bear better weapons or more weapons? To such ideas Foch replies with a quotation from General Cardot: "One hundred thousand men suffer ten thousand casualties and confess themselves beaten: they retreat before the victors who have lost as many men, if not more. Moreover, neither the one side nor the other knows, when retiring, either what numbers they have lost themselves or what the casualties have been on the opposite side. Ninety thousand vanquished men retire before ninety thousand victors merely because they have had enough of it, . . . because they are *demoralised*, because their *moral* resistance is exhausted." Foch reinforces this with the quotation from Joseph de Maistre: "A battle lost is a battle one thinks one has lost; for a battle cannot be lost physically."

Foch himself extends the aphorism by saying: "A battle won is a battle in which one will not confess oneself beaten." "To organise battle consists in enhancing our own spirit to the highest degree in order to break that of the enemy. The will to conquer: such is victory's primary condition."

It is significant that Foch, after exalting the active form of war, should now lay greater stress on the passive aspect of the moral struggle—the strengthening of one's own spirit. It is true that he comes later to the active aspect, that of upsetting the enemy's moral balance, but we feel less inspiration, less depth, in his discussion of it. Was this tendency the product of 1870?

The will to conquer "amounts to a supreme resolve which the commander must, if need be, impart to the soldier's soul." "To think, to will, to possess intelligence and energy, will not suffice for him; he must possess also the 'imperative fluid' (De Brack), the gift of communicating his own supreme energy to the masses of men who are, so to speak, his weapon; for an army is to a chief what a sword is to a soldier. It is only worth anything in so far as it receives from him a certain impulse. . . ." "Great results in war are due to the commander. History is therefore right in making generals responsible for victories, in which case they are glorified; and for defeats, in which case

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they are disgraced." One wonders whether this reflection came back to Foch's mind at the end of 1916, and helped him to endure his own penalty with equanimity. "Is it not, again, this influence of the commander, the very enthusiasm derived from him, which alone can explain the unconscious movements of human masses at those solemn moments when, without knowing why it is doing so, an army on the battlefield feels it is being carried forward as if it were gliding down a slope."

Foch reinforces his own words with "masses" of quotations, but he imparts "an imperative fluid" of his own. And later years were to show that he possessed the gift of communicating it, at least to those men with whom he came in contact. How far it spread outward and downward is a question—examined in the chapters on his war career. But we leave Foch's discussion of leadership with the feeling that here is neither theory nor pedantry, and with a sense of having been in direct contact with the spirit of the author—a spirit that has both transcended and broken free from the academic sphere.

In the next section Foch examines the problem of breaking the enemy's spirit. The section seems disproportionately brief. But it opens promisingly with a quotation from Xenophon, first of the great writers on war and the acknowledged guide of the Great Captains: "Whatever a thing may be, be it pleasant or variable, the less it has been foreseen, the more it pleases or frightens. This is seen nowhere better than in war, where surprise strikes with terror even those who are much the stronger party." And Foch himself adds: "The means of breaking the enemy's spirit, of proving to him that his cause is lost, is, then, surprise in the widest sense of that word." "Here we have a novel instrument, and one capable of destructive power beyond all knowledge."

But in Foch's sense that "widest sense" is quickly narrowed down to that "of striking *one supreme stroke on one point*." Under his treatment surprise becomes hardly more than the prolongation—to a fine point—of his mechanistic theory. "A destructive force must be made to appear which should be known, or seen, to the enemy to be superior to his own; to this end, forces . . .

must be concentrated on a point where the enemy is not able to *parry* instantly—that is, to answer by deploying an equal number of forces at the same time.” “To surprise, thus amounts to crushing an opponent from *a short distance by numbers in a limit of time.*”

The variety of surprise produced by the Great Captains, and its compound means, are briefly dismissed with the comment: “Setting an ambush, attacking in reverse, are possible in a small war, but impracticable in a great one.” Can we be surprised, in view of such scant examination, that among the commanders of 1914 there was so little research for surprise? Can we wonder that the rediscovery of surprise, in its artistic range, was delayed until the last year of the war in France?

It is true that the scale of the forces tended to restrict the effect of surprise, and brought new difficulties into its execution. Obviously, an ambush—in the literal sense—could no longer be framed, save as a local incident. But there was still opportunity for subtle adaptation of the ambush idea—as was to be shown near Reims on July 15th, 1918. Even the First Battle of the Marne, if an intentional illustration, pointed the way to renewed possibilities. It is also true that the advent of aircraft tore aside the veil which formerly had hidden strategic manœuvres. But, in compensation for loss of concealment, it opened fresh opportunities for deception, and was an incentive to more subtle ingenuity—which might replace the veil with a false nose.

The criticism of Foch’s teaching on surprise is not that it was a wrong diagnosis of the moral condition, but that it was too narrow and its treatment too shallow to make a due impression, to counteract the military predisposition towards physical action. Up to a point the diagnosis was discerning. An “army is a living and organised being. Now an organism is a set of organs, the health and good condition of all in which are necessary to the individual life. A loss in them—be it but the loss of one of them—brings about death. To beat an adversary, it is not necessary ‘to sever his arms, his legs and his head, pierce his chest and burst open his belly all at once’ (General Cardot). One sword thrust to the heart, or one stunning blow on the head,

ensures the result. It is enough to overthrow the wing of an army, its centre—any important part of the whole—to ensure the result.”

Here Foch carries simplification too far. The thrust to the heart or the blow on the head will certainly be decisive. But these organs will naturally be well guarded, the most guarded. It will only be possible to strike them by means of some terrific deception, or, more likely, after the paralysis of lesser organs has weakened the opponent's power to guard his major organs. And it is in this initial weakening, this crippling of functional activity, that real surprise has scope and is necessary.

Foch makes another good deduction from the fact that discipline is the condition on which “hierarchic organisation,” and the transmission and execution of orders, depend. “Therefore, to break the chain is to put a stop at once to the functioning of all ranks, to transform tactical units into mere masses of men. . . . In order to break it, all you need do is to spread moral or physical disorder; to overthrow the organisation at *one point* of the system.”

The first sentence is accurate, but the second too extreme. The effect of a break at one point is counteracted by the increase in the size of forces, and by the fact of their being composed of self-contained bodies. Multiplication of forces tends to localisation of physical effects. Hence it becomes more effective to play on the mind of the enemy commander than on the bodies of a section of his men. His mind is more accessible to the general influence of a local effect. It is strange that Foch, who had exalted the importance of the commander when discussing his own army, should have under-emphasised it when dealing with the enemy's.

Still less happy is the example he selects to illustrate his idea of surprise—the advance of Macdonald's massive column at Wagram. Foch recognises its defects, even its absurdity, but claims that it produced a triumphant unexpectedness through its very crudity and violence. And he acclaims it as “a purely moral action, which alone brought about decision and a *complete decision*.” But in fact the moral impression was chiefly on the

French. Whereas the whole Austrian Army retired unbeaten and ready to renew the battle next day, we know that out of the thirty thousand men in that massed column, some twenty-four thousand shirked the suicidal sacrifice, while the sight of the three thousand who fell in its lumbering wake so shook the Grand Army that, a few hours later, it suffered the worst panic in its record and was too shaken to follow up its superficial advantage. The fruits of the battle were reaped not in pursuit but in diplomatic negotiation, where artifice retrieved what lack of artifice had seriously imperilled on the field of battle.

Only a narrow view would suggest that Wagram was a profitable victory; time, indeed, was to show that the "conquering of the ground held by the enemy" at Wagram was a dangerous illusion. And even that conquering is truly to be traced to the tremendous concentration of guns which blasted the hole rather than to the mere handful of men who staggered through it. If such a form of physical action to produce a moral effect was an absurdity in 1809, how much more so a century later, in the era of machine-guns! No allowance for improved formation of the mass can make a parallel practicable, or bridge the chasm between the two eras. The one real significance of the example is that a teacher of twentieth-century warfare should have used it as an illustration of moral action—thereby revealing the essentially mechanistic basis of the pre-1914 art of war.

This is still more clearly seen when Foch passes on to discuss the "battle of manœuvre" and to extol its merits in contrast to "the parallel battle." Of the second he says: "Such a battle consists in putting up with a constant, a successive wear and tear, until the result ensues from one or more successful actions of particular combatants—subordinate commanders or units. Such actions all remain second-rate, because their decision never involves more than a portion of the troops engaged." In face of such a verdict, how was it that the commanders of 1914-17, Foch among them, adopted such a partial method and expected success from it?

Rejecting it in his theory, Foch declared: "Mechanics as well as psychology leads us to the 'battle of manœuvre.' The means

provided by the first consist in *applying superior forces on one point*; the means provided by the second consist in *producing a peril, an attack that cannot be parried*. . . . In the battle of manœuvre . . . the reserve is a *club* . . . hurled as one block, in the course of an action exceeding in violence and energy all the combats of the battle. . . .”

But this conception was built on a fallacy, and was undermined by the improvement of weapons which Foch too lightly passed over. The theory of the Greek phalanx, with its reliance on mass, is nullified by the modern machine-gun. The more ranks, the more swaths of dead—that is all. It is no use to concentrate a reserve five or ten lines deep at a point held by only one line of opponents, if your first line cannot break through that one line. In face of this hard reality, the mechanistic theory of surprise broke down in the World War. The problem of surprise was found to be in the first place psychological, and only second, mechanical. To break the line one had to revive, if also to adapt, the old tricks of surprise practised throughout the ages in the despised “small war.” Mechanics was then called into play to expand the opening and prevent its repair—in solving the problem of maintaining speed and continuity of advance.

Foch summed up his views in a chapter entitled “Modern Battle.” In it he emphasised that “the part played by *preparation* is becoming greater in every way: Inform better; Resist longer, and Fix more efficiently.” The process would take the form of seizing the “important points of the ground”—a process that is not easy to reconcile with his running criticism of those who base their tactics on “geographical points.” Foch, indeed, did not perceive the logical implication of his theory; it was left to the Germans to produce, in the infiltration method, tactics which truly disregarded—and annulled—the traditional value attached to such points.

Foch showed more prevision in discussing the action of artillery. He argued that artillery had the power “to grip hold of the enemy”; that its power must be developed early and to the full, keeping no guns in reserve; that it must “prepare the attack”; that it should be capable of concentrating its fire with-

out the batteries being necessarily concentrated in space, "the artillery of the army corps working in a common direction (which does not mean in a single place)." Thus he foreshadowed the idea of manœuvre of fire.

But, like many artillerymen, he overestimated the effect of artillery fire in paralysing the resistance of well-posted infantry. He was confident that "superior fire" would silence the enemy's fire. And to this delusion we may perhaps in part trace his faith in force, sheer force. "Numbers create *surprise* in the enemy's ranks, as well as the conviction that he cannot resist." Here, stripped of ornamentation, is the keystone of his fabric of war. Despite his just emphasis on *preparation*, he underestimated the need for deception and distraction—the *drawing away and apart* of the enemy's force—in fulfilling this preparation.

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Foch's second book, *De la Conduite de la Guerre*, opens with a repetition of his view that battle is the only argument in modern war, and the object of all strategy. But it becomes a better book. One cause, although not the only cause, of this development is that its scope is limited in accord with its limited theme. For it is a detailed study of a particular case—the first phase of the war of 1870 as waged within the narrow confines of the Franco-German frontier. The study has great interest and practical value as a day-by-day examination of the working of a strategist's mind.

Moltke is here put under Foch's microscope. And the fact that he was a strategist, not merely a tactician, leads to an enlargement of Foch's own view. Moltke certainly aimed to overthrow the French armies, but he made Paris his ultimate objective. Thither all his moves converged, and towards its capture his plans were directed—because he regarded the capital as the nerve-centre of the French people. Once it was numbed their resistance, he calculated, would collapse. It proved a just calculation.

Hence Foch, studying Moltke, is led to recognise the necessity and value of giving strategy a moral objective—in the background at least. (A generation later, when he has experience both of war and of its new weapon, aircraft, he will put this objective

in the foreground.) He appreciates, too, the logical deduction from the fact that the victories of Metz and Sedan did not lead at once to peace—obviously, the overthrow of the enemy's main army did not suffice. And yet in this case the overthrow had a completeness rarely paralleled in history.

Foch thus comes to recognise, better than many of his contemporaries, the value of the People's Rising that Gambetta organised. He sees that it had a real chance of retrieving the defeat of the organised armies. He argues that the French leaders should have minimised the moral importance of their capital, dissociating it from the fortune of the country as a whole. This thought leads to another, to the suggestion that in the future the industrial regions, rich agricultural districts, and great ports, on which the armies depend for supply will become the new "national objectives" rather than the capital. It might be claimed for Foch that here he anticipated the theory now upheld by exponents of air strategy.

Foch also inclines to the opinion that the political objective should guide the direction of the military operations. The German armies should so manoeuvre as to separate the French from Paris, not to drive them back upon it. The French should take Mayence as their objective on the way to Berlin, because Mayence "is the point where the interests of the north and those of the south converge and in consequence divide. Our strategy in seeking the great battle . . . will thus not manoeuvre indifferently by the right or by the left, but in such a way as to throw the enemy armies away from the direction of Mayence, and then to cut them off from the road to Berlin."

The task of following Moltke through the campaign of 1870, and the necessity of understanding the policy which governed strategy, had momentarily lifted Foch's mind above the battlefield and out of the tactical rut into which professional soldiers are apt, through their training, to slip. If this enlargement of his horizon came through an extensive study of 1870, the most purely military of campaigns, how much greater might have been its expansion if he had similarly studied other wars? What benefit might he not have reaped from the American Civil War

in particular ?—so long as he avoided the British pitfall of imagining that this war was fought out in the Shenandoah Valley.

Space forbids, and humanity forbids, that we should ask the reader to accompany us through Foch's detailed study of Moltke in August, 1870. For his material, Foch owed much to the German criticism of this campaign, which, under the pioneer guidance of Captain Hoenig, had uncovered the real foundations beneath the stucco of the German General Staff history. While generous in his praise of Moltke and, even more, of the troop-leaders he had trained, Foch made good use of the errors of appreciation and action which historical criticism had disclosed. From them he drew practical lessons. From them, also, he drew a moral to enhance the moral outlook for France in another war. For the suggestion constantly underlying his argument is that the French need not have been beaten if they had utilised the opportunities which German error opened to them. Hence the motto which he gives in his preface—“*In memoriam ; in spem !*”

The German fault he emphasises most is that of acting on preconceived ideas instead of on ascertained knowledge. Moltke based his plan on what he reasoned that the French, as rational opponents, would do. He suffered dislocations of plan, only restored by the initiative of the troop-leaders, because the French command proved irrational and incapable in its actions. An ignorant swordsman may prove more dangerous to a master than a mediocre one—because his sword-play is less calculable. His very ignorance endows him with the supreme element of the unexpected.

The main lesson that Foch draws is naturally that of *sûreté*—of finding and fixing. He compares Moltke's method unfavourably with that of Napoleon, in the lack of a general advanced guard and in the directness of his attack : “ Napoleon turning the enemy army *before* the battle with the *bulk* of his army, which he has reassembled, and only attacking then ; Moltke turning the adversary *during* the battle with a part of his forces . . . ; the reassembling of his means taking place on the battlefield through the convergence of columns. The first pursues *more surely* a victory *more fruitful*. . . ” Foch recognises that under

modern conditions, with large armies in a cramped space, the Napoleonic manœuvre against the lines of communication became more difficult, if of even greater potential effect. The railways enable the bulk of the forces to be rushed immediately to the frontier, thus tending to a frontal clash, and the very desire to be ready first leads to a predetermined and inelastic line of advance. To these conditions, Foch suggests, Moltke's "more prosaic manœuvre" may be traced. But he argues that the further development of the network of railways since 1870 has revived the scope for Napoleonic combinations, making possible "a last hour concentration, creating *ipso facto* the element of surprise, in the Napoleonic style, if to this elastic use of the railways is added combination of the road-marches."

Foch thus favours the formation of an army of manœuvre pivoting on the rail axis rather than a preconceived detrainment and deployment. In contrast to the last, and to the plans of campaign which were actually followed in 1914, it may be fairly claimed that Foch's was a far-sighted conception—not a preconception. As he truly said, a preconceived manœuvre, even though intended to turn the enemy's flank, "leads to a purely linear strategy."

But because of this reasoning Foch was led to make a forecast of the German plan, in a future war, that proved false. This forecast is outlined in one of the book's most interesting passages. In it he controverted those who were saying that the Germans would come through Belgium in order to avoid the French fortress barrier. "That is not likely, for the concentration should have as its first object the assembly of all the forces in the shortest time possible; it requires the fullest possible employment of the railways, detraining stations, etc. It will thus be made, unquestionably and solely, in the region that is best equipped." The German concentration would therefore be in Alsace-Lorraine, as it was superior in this respect to the lower Rhine. At the time he wrote, this difference existed, and so his contemporary argument was sound in theory. He also added other military reasons against the Belgian line of advance: that the Germans would have to "weaken themselves by leaving detachments in

front of Antwerp or at Brussels"; and that they would give the French a chance to attack them in flank with full force—provided that the French "assembled in a single mass" round a rail axis that enabled them to pivot for a blow "north, east, or south." This axis should be "a point on the line Château-Salins to Clermont-Ferrand"—a suggestion which implies a zone of assembly well back from the frontier.

Because of this qualification as to the French plan, it is not fair to judge Foch's forecast in the light of 1914. For the French plan did not fulfil his condition, and we cannot tell what the result would have been if it had. But it is a fair criticism that the virtue of his assembly plan depended on a defensive-offensive strategy, whereas his general teaching fanned the offensive spirit that inspired the plan of 1914, while devoting no study to the counter-offensive. Moreover, his dismissal of the idea that the Germans would come through Belgium verged on the very type of pre-conception he denounced. They would not come that way because it was not theoretically sound, because it did not accord with his principle. But what was the value of that principle if in practice the French fortress line was invulnerable to direct attack? Whatever the strategic difficulties, any alternative would be better than a tactical impossibility. All obstacles are more surmountable, all problems more soluble, than those of human resistance. To such a practical conclusion the German General Staff had, indeed, come while Foch was expounding his principle. In Foch's conclusion we discern the effect of his innate tendency to confound the practicable with the desirable, the real with the ideal. And this tendency in turn came because he did not keep his feet firmly enough on the groundwork of war, the means of offence and defence.

It is just to recognise that he had more technical foresight than many of his contemporaries. He advocated—and predicted—the use of heavy artillery in the field, instead of reserving it for siege operations; he urged the development of all new weapons which might increase the power of the offensive. But what he failed to see truly was the way that modern weapons would reinforce the defence, and the effect of this reinforcement upon his

theory of strategy and tactics. Whilst looking ahead along the path, the too narrow path, pointed out by Clausewitz, Foch failed to look carefully at the ground beneath his feet. And thus he, like blinder men, fell into a ditch—the ditch that stretched from the Swiss frontier to the English Channel.

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